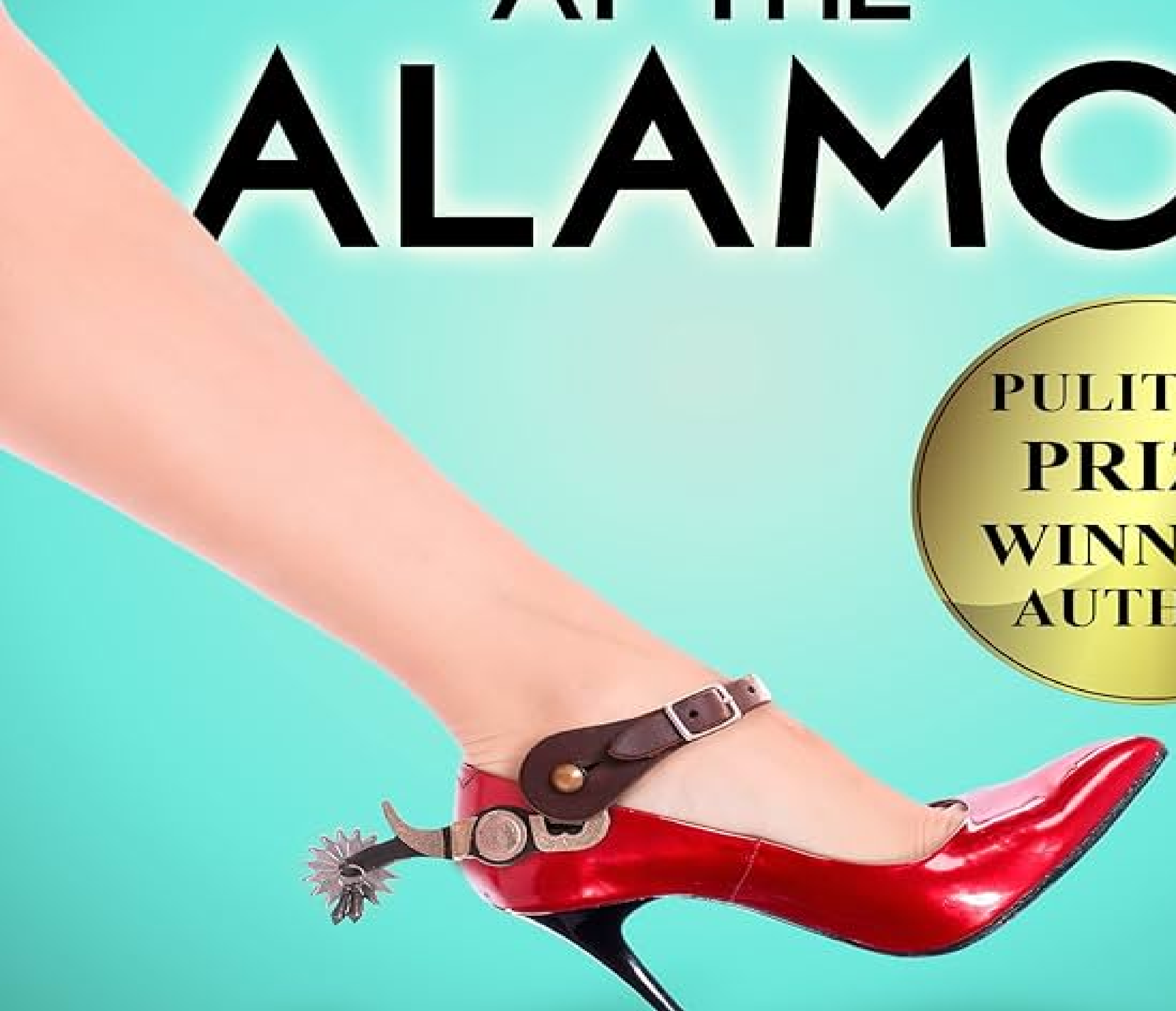
PAUL ZINDEL

LADIES AT THE ALAMO



PULITZER
PRIZE
WINNING
AUTHOR

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BY **PAUL ZINDEL**

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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

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LADIES AT THE ALAMO was first presented by Edgar Bronfman, Jr., for Sagittarius Entertainment, at the Martin Beck Theatre, in New York City, on April 7, 1977. It was directed by Frank Perry; the scenery was by Peter Larkin; costumes were by Ruth Morley; and the lighting was by Marc B. Weiss. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

Dede Cooper	Estelle Parsons
Bella Gardner	Eileen Heckart
Suits	Susan Peretz
Joanne Remington	Rosemary Murphy
Shirley Fuller	Jan Farrand

SETTING

The Remington Room of a multi-million dollar theater complex in Texas City, Texas

SYNOPSIS

Act I—THE AMBUSH

Early evening

Act II—MASSACRE

Ten minutes later

LADIES AT THE ALAMO

ACT ONE

THE AMBUSH

THE SETTING: *The Remington Room, a luxurious space for Board Meetings and the entertainment of honored guests in a new, multi-million dollar theater building in Texas City, Texas.*

There is a horseshoe shaped conference table on a platform L. *It is lavishly decorated and boasts barbecued ribs along with a variety of other foods.*

There are two bars, one U. L. C. *and another* D. R. *They are also ladened with food along with healthy setups of bourbon and buckets of champagne.*

U. R. C. *there is a huge cake in the shape of the theater building, which looks something like a German bunker with flying buttresses. The cake is on its own rolling stand, and emblazoned on the skirt of the stand are the words "Happy First Year."*

The R. *wall is decorated with posters of the various plays done through the 15 years the Alamo Theater has existed, though 14 of those years were in an old converted church building at another location in the town. A large picture of this converted church is prominently displayed on the* U. L. *wall, surrounded by a variety of theater awards and citations.*

At R. *there is an executive desk complete with a console panel in the center of it. It consists of a microphone and several practical switches and lights.*

There is an entrance U. L. C. *leading to the lobby of the theatre itself, and another at* R. *which leads to various other facilities of the Executive Board Room.*

L. *is made up entirely of a huge picture window through*

which we see the magnificent Texas sunset. All of the ladies as they appear this evening are decked out as elegantly as the room, Texas-style, for a meeting is to take place immediately following a performance of The Seagull *which is having its grand anniversary opening on the main stage.*

The curtain rises on an empty set. After a beat the intercom system on Dede's desk begins buzzing frantically, insistently. Dede Cooper hurries in from U. *carrying two slide carousels. She is a gutsy, honest and striking Texas original. A true one-of-a-kind individual who delights in being charming and amusing and yet can be devastatingly intense and passionate if the occasion demands. If the spirit of the American pioneer is alive and well anywhere it is in the heart of Dede Cooper. And what makes her even more attractive is that she can enjoy her own theatricality.*

She crosses to the desk and turns on a switch at the control board.

DEDE. Yes? What is it?

BARBSIE'S VOICE. Mrs. Cooper! Mrs. Cooper! Mikey wants you. They're ready to take the curtain up.

DEDE. O.K. honey, I'll buzz him. (*She hits another switch.*) Mikey? Mikey?

MIKEY'S VOICE. Yes, Mrs. Cooper.

DEDE. Mikey, I'm in the Remington Room. All set to go?

MIKEY'S VOICE. House is in and settled, Mrs. Cooper. We're all set.

DEDE. O.K. Mikey. Take it away. And good luck tonight.

MIKEY'S VOICE. Thanks, Mrs. Cooper. (*During the following, Dede crosses to the slide projector on the* D. *end of the desk and inserts a carousel. She then moves* D. R. *to make herself a drink. She listens intently.*)

STAGE MANAGER. Standby everybody! House lights to half! (*Pause.*) House lights out! (*Pause.*) Curtain! (*Beat.*) Light cue Number 1—go! (*There is a smattering of applause for the set.*)

MEDVEDENKO'S VOICE. Why do you always wear black?

MASHA'S VOICE. I am in mourning for my life. I am unhappy.

MEDVEDENKO'S VOICE. You unhappy? I can't understand it.

You look good and your father's not rich, but he's well enough off. My life is a harder row to plough than yours. (*The audience sounds restless on the speakers. Dede crosses to the desk and sits, flipping another switch to speak into the microphone.*)

DEDE. Betsy, Betsy! Why is the audience coughing like that? What's going on down there?

BETSY'S VOICE. The actors started slow, Mrs. Cooper.

DEDE. Well, then signal them to speed it up. Hold up the "Fast is good!" sign. Fast is good! I don't want that audience bored.

BETSY'S VOICE. Yes, Mrs. Cooper. Are you all right, Mrs. Cooper?

DEDE. Yes, I'm fine.

BETSY'S VOICE. You sound tired. I could send Barbsie up to be with you. We don't need her backstage.

DEDE. No thanks, honey, my energy is just a little low from the funeral. Betsy, I want you to know every time I looked at the arrangement of Spider Mums that the cast and crew sent, it was like someone stuck a needle of love into my veins. No matter what happens tonight, everybody down there knows I love them, don't they?

BETSY'S VOICE. Yes, Mrs. Cooper. We know that. (*Dede flips another switch on the intercom.*)

DEDE. Barbsie, where's Bella?

BARBSIE'S VOICE. I don't know, Mrs. Cooper.

DEDE. Well, then please go find her and tell her to get back on up here. Tell her I need her.

BARBSIE'S VOICE. She was standing at the back of the theater when the play started, Mrs. Cooper. I'll see if she's still there.

DEDE. Thank you, honey. (*Flipping another switch.*) Bill, is Bella down there at the bar?

BILL'S VOICE. No, Mrs. Cooper. Want me to look for her?

DEDE. Yes, I want you to look for her. I need her. Oh, Baby Jesus, do I need her! (*Bella Gardner enters. She is an attractive drinker, the kind of woman who always stars in the local musical of a small town—with the exception that she seems conscious of her destiny, dresses with expensive comment, and is wickedly calculating no matter how much she's had to drink.*)

BILL'S VOICE. What's the matter, Mrs. Cooper?

DEDE. Never mind, Bill, here she is. (*To Bella, who is crossing*

D. R. *to the bar.*) What the hell took you so long? I'm going out of my mind.

BELLA. You told me to go snoop, and snooping takes time. At least, you'll be thrilled to know Masha and Medvedenko have the audience rivited.

DEDE. Bella, I appreciate your trying to make me feel good, but I can hear what's going on down there. (*She crosses to the cake and wheels it* D. L. C.) How do you like the cake? Isn't that some cake! They've never seen anything like that around here—have they?

BELLA. (*Crossing* C.) The Board of Trustees is just going to love it—where else can they come to the opening night of a play and then come upstairs for a champagne reception and eat the theater!

DEDE. (*Crossing back to the desk.*) I've got a presentation that's going to knock their eyes out. (*Into the microphone.*) Jennie Lee, what's the house count?

JENNIE LEE'S VOICE. One thousand twenty two, Mrs. Cooper. That's almost ninety two per cent of capacity.

DEDE. Yes, but how many of them are paid?

JENNIE LEE'S VOICE. About a third.

DEDE. Damn! (*To Bella.*) This carousel is the whole first year at the new Alamo. Lots of pictures of the Board—you know how they love to see themselves—and then this carousel is all the nostalgia stuff from when we were in the old converted church building. Would you stop chug-a-luggin' the bourbon—it doesn't look good having a dipsomaniac as the volunteer head of the Children's Theatre Program.

BELLA. (*Crossing to the bar and pouring a drink as Dede picks up the phone.*) Listen, after what I found out I need this—and you're going to need another one, too.

DEDE. (*Into phone.*) Virginia! I'm in the Remington Room in case there are any calls. I want you to finish putting the blow-ups in the scrapbook. I want them laying around here just in case some of the older Trustees—you know, the ones with cataracts, can't see the slides.

BELLA. Dede, I've got a few unpleasant things to tell you.

DEDE. (*Returning to the projector.*) I'm going to hit that Board with such a dose of nostalgia their annual vote of confidence in me will be unanimous.

BELLA. (*Crossing to Dede but looking front at the projection.*) Oh my God, Dede! Is that us in that slide?

DEDE. Who the hell d'you think it was?

BELLA. Lordy Lord, look at us! Look at us!

DEDE. Here you are in *South Pacific*. And here I am with Mama when she came down for the opening of our *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

BELLA. Oh, you were one hell of a Medea! Oh Jesus, *Streetcar!* Remember how I used to have to wrestle Stanley every intermission.

DEDE. Baby Jesus, look! Howie and I getting married on the set of *A Comedy of Errors*, you remember that—all the press we got? Poor Howie fell off the stage—and I went on to give the performance of my life.

BELLA. (*Moving* C.) Dede, you might as well stop babbling and listen. I'm going to have to tell you sooner or later.

DEDE. (*Turning off the projector.*) What'd you find out?

BELLA. The worst you thought is true. Indians are running around this joint with hatchets! Joanne is leading the charge waving a great big tomahawk.

DEDE. That son-of-a-bitch!

BELLA. If she's such a son-of-a-bitch, then why did you name this room after her.

DEDE. This room is named after her money, not her.

BELLA. I found out you weren't gone ten minutes before she called a meeting right here with all the pro-union members of your beloved staff.

DEDE. She called a meeting? In this room?

BELLA. And she met with your confidential secretary— (*Crossing* L.) who wasn't so confidential, I heard.

DEDE. (*Moving the cake back against the* U. *wall, and then crossing to* U. *of the desk.*) Virginia? My Virginia? I'll kill Virginia. I swear I will. I'll kill her if she doesn't overdose on her Librium first.

BELLA. Then she met with your volunteers for the New Alamo Theatre Subscription Guild.

DEDE. All right, let's hear what the President of my Board of Trustees said.

BELLA. (*Crossing* U. C.) Summarily, Joanne told the entire Board, your staff and your volunteers that you are inept.

DEDE. Oh, Baby Jesus—that bitch. (*She crosses to the desk, sits and turns on the intercom.*) Barbsie! Barbsie!

BARBSIE'S VOICE. Yes, Mrs. Cooper. (*Bella slowly crosses* L. *onto the platform and gazes out the window.*)

DEDE. I want you to go over to where Miss Remington is sitting and tell her Mrs. Cooper wants to see her in the Remington Room.

BARBSIE'S VOICE. Yes, Mrs. Cooper. You mean at intermission?

DEDE. I mean now. You tell her I'm directing another drama up here and it's a Command Performance! You may also tell her I suspect it's going to have a grand finale.

BARBSIE'S VOICE. Yes, Mrs. Cooper. (*Dede shuts off the intercom.*)

BELLA. Dede!

DEDE. What?

BELLA. Never mind, I just thought I saw something.

DEDE. Don't you "never-mind-me"—you know how that gets on my nerves— (*Crossing to* C.) if you start saying something—finish it!

BELLA. I thought I saw something but it must have been my hypoglycemia. I thought I saw a man in a window across the street—I couldn't have seen a man in a window because that building is abandoned. It must have been a ghost.

DEDE. Don't you talk about ghosts. I'm the one seeing ghosts. Every place I look I see the face of my Mama. Oh, baby Jesus, Bella, they put her into a bag! Oh, Jesus Christ, Bella, I let the police ambulance attendants come into that house and put her into a rubber bag. I feel so guilty. I feel like jumping in my car and crashing it into a cement wall!

BELLA. (*Crossing to Dede.*) Oh, Honey, you don't crash that Cognac Cadillac Seville into anything. If you want to die, I'll shoot you.

DEDE. (*Bursting into tears.*) I wasn't there when she needed me! I was trying to get this play open down here, it just seemed like everybody was working against me—down here; up there. I got all the way up there and that aunt of mine had to tell me every detail—Doctors shoving her full of their experimental drugs and all my Mama kept screaming was, "Let me die!—Let me die!"

BELLA. Dede, Joanne's counting on you being under the weather, you understand me?

DEDE. I'm not stupid. (*Drying her tears and crossing* L. C.) Then

I come home this afternoon to Howie—some husband—he wouldn't even go with me to Muleshoe. I walk in the house, he doesn't ask me anything about the funeral. Just sits there watching his football games and smoking his stinky cigars. I'm telling you, Bella, something horrible is happening to the men in this country. (*Crossing up onto platform.*) Something horrible. (*Suits enters* U. C. *and Dede pulls herself together. Suits is a fat younger woman and she seems rather jolly and naive like most truly fat people do. She's got a good cover on whatever neurotic impulses cause her to gorge herself, as she obviously does. Although she tries her best to be obsequious to all, there is a reservoir of power underneath it all.*)

SUITS. Hi Dede,—Bella.

BELLA. (*Crossing to* D. R. *bar.*) Suits.

SUITS. (*Crossing to Dede on platform.*) Dede, I was so sorry to hear about your Mama. I sent a sympathy card to Muleshoe, but I don't suppose it got there in time.

DEDE. No it didn't, honey. But I know I was in your thoughts.

SUITS. You certainly were—in my thoughts and my prayers. Joanne knows you want to see her but she had to make a phone call. Virginia said it was okay if she took care of it in your office. (*Suits crosses to* U. *end of the table and lays out papers and folders.*)

DEDE. (*Crossing to desk.*) Oh yeah, is that what Virginia said?

BELLA. I'd say they both have one hell of a nerve, and what are you doing up here?

SUITS. Now look, Bella. Joanne told me to come. Maybe she wants me to take dictation or something. I don't know.

BELLA. Just don't devour the entire buffet before the reception starts. (*Sitting on a bar stool.*) I've never seen anyone mutilate a bowl of guacamole dip the way you can.

DEDE. Now, Bella, don't go picking on little Suits. (*Crossing* L.) She really loves to kid you, doesn't she?

SUITS. Oh, yea. Bella's a great kidder.

DEDE. Suits, there's nothing that's going on around here tonight that's your fault, is it?

SUITS. What's going on?

BELLA. You know very well what's going on.

DEDE. (*Crossing to desk.*) I heard you and Joanne saw the play during the previews?

SUITS. (*Crossing to Dede.*) Dede, would I miss one of your

shows? I think that is the best Chekov ever in Texas, and I want to tell you, I hope the opening tonight goes real good for you. In fact, I know Joanne did not like being interrupted during the performance. She was really enjoying it again.

DEDE. I just can's imagine her coming to so many previews. I mean, we're usually lucky to get her to show up on opening nights, ablaze with all her diamonds.

SUITS. Dede, that *Seagull!* That just shows what a solid director you are. It was amazing the way that cast could just pull it all together, and with you not even around to shape it up.

DEDE. Suits, you know, you ought to come back and do a show for us. You just tell Joanne you want a hiatus from being that high-class companion-secretary, whatever the hell you do for her —and you come do some stepping for us now that we got the spanking big new stage.

SUITS. (*Stepping* L.) I could not.

DEDE. (*Stepping in.*) Sure you could. Hey, and what did you think of the cover on the program tonight? Isn't it a dazzler?

SUITS. Full color! Full color! I said, "that Dede Cooper still knows how to spend the money."

DEDE. You bet I do, and I know how to spend it in the right department. This crowd wants a souvenir program, and that's what they get. I mean, they're not that crazy about the play. Half the time we'd do better if we'd just get those critics down here and have them review the program.

SUITS. And don't think I didn't notice that cake over there the minute I came in.

BELLA. I knew you'd spot that.

SUITS. I mean, the Board of Trustees is going to really get a kick out of that.

DEDE. (*Crossing around behind the desk.*) You bet. It's going to be a wonderful evening. (*She turns on the intercom to the stage.*)

NINA'S VOICE. . . . forces of matter—I am destined to conquer . . . (*Joanne Remington enters* U. C. *She looks like what she is: rich and powerful; a presence to be reckoned with. She's a bit like a pacing animal whose primitive instincts are imprisoned by bars made of generations of social steel.*)

JOANNE. Hello, Dede, It's good to have you back.

DEDE. Why, thank you, Joanne.

JOANNE. We all felt very badly for you. Hello, Bella.

BELLA. Cheers, Joanne! Cheers! What an attractive fabric!

DEDE. Suits, would you mind warming the ribs up in the service kitchen? I want everything perfect for my President of the Board and all the Board members.

SUITS. I'd be glad to, Dede. (*Crossing* L. *onto the platform.*) All right, Joanne?

JOANNE. It's all right. You can help if you want to.

SUITS. They look very good. (*Suits takes the ribs and crosses* R. *off the platform. Bella gets up from the stool and slowly makes her way* U. C. *in time to meet Suits.*)

BELLA. You just make sure you leave some out here because I think I'm gonna need all the strength I can get tonight, you understand me, Beatrice?

SUITS. (*Stopping and turning back to Bella.*) Bella, don't call me Beatrice. My name is Suits.

BELLA. I'm the one who nicknamed you "Suits" when you first rolled in here eleven years ago from Port Arthur. She was the first one in Texas City to ever wear pants suits. Weren't you, Beatrice! (*Joanne crosses up onto the platform.*)

SUITS. Then please just call me Suits! All right?

BELLA. Certainly. Perfectly O.K. (*Suits continues her cross to the* R. *arch.*) Now just don't shove all the ribs down your throat while you're out in the kitchen, Beatrice. (*Suits stops, shrugs and then exits.*)

DEDE. (*Crossing* D. *and then to the front of the desk.*) Joanne, I'm sure glad you've been making yourself at home around the theater. I kept saying to myself, why doesn't Joanne use this room? I mean we named it after her!

JOANNE. (*Crossing to* C.) That's right. You told me to use the room, so I used it.

DEDE. And that makes me real happy. (*Bella slowly crosses* L. *and onto the platform.*) I mean, after all, what's the point of getting all the press on how wonderful this building is if we don't take advantage of all its facilities! (*Reaching over to the desk and picking up a stack of press clippings.*) Have you been reading all that press?

JOANNE. Of course I read it. I'm President of the Board, and I read everything about the Alamo with great care.

DEDE. Then you know what the press goes for. They just love the flying buttresses. (*Crossing to Joanne.*) And remember how you

and I fought over those things? You said you didn't think we should have them, and I said we should, and now they have ended up being glorified by the newspapers.

JOANNE. I still don't like them.

DEDE. Well, you may not like them, but a lot of other people do. (*Suits enters, gets another plate of ribs from the* D. R. *bar and exits.*)

BELLA. (*Transfixed at the window.*) Oh my God! Oh my God!

DEDE. Bella, what is the matter with you now?

BELLA. I wasn't seeing things! Get over here, quick! Quick!

DEDE. Oh, for crying out loud! What!

BELLA. The old Monastery across the street, third floor—second window from the left—you can just see with the street light—that was no ghost I saw.

JOANNE. (*Crossing to Dede.*) Dede, maybe it'd be less distracting if Bella left us alone.

BELLA. You just get over here and you take a look. There is a man in a window across the street from us and that man is nude. (*Suits has entered again and stands* U. *of the desk.*)

JOANNE. You are drunk already.

BELLA. I am not drunk, there is a man over there.

DEDE. (*Crossing* L.) Oh, come on now, Bella. You cut that out. There's nobody over there.

BELLA. Will you open your eyes for crying out loud!

DEDE. Baby Jesus! She's not kidding! There is somebody—oh, my God, he's got no clothes on! (*Joanne crosses* D. *of the desk, and Suits crosses* D. L. C. *to join Dede.*)

BELLA. That's what they call nude.

SUITS. It must be that new caretaker they've got living over there.

JOANNE. How would you know who's living over there?

SUITS. Barbsie and Betsy told me. He's supposed to be crazy! What's he doing?

BELLA. Well, off hand, I'd say it's called the "Secret Vice." Either that, or it's one hell of an isometric.

SUITS. He is! He's playing with hisself!

DEDE. He's looking at us!

SUITS. No, I don't think so.

JOANNE. Suits, get away from there!

DEDE. You're right, he's not looking at us.

BELLA. He's not looking at us.

JOANNE. Suits, I said get away from there. (*Suits moves slightly* U.)

BELLA. (*Running to Joanne and trying to pull her to the window.*) He's looking up over the building, he's looking up over us. Come on, Joanne, you've got to see this.

JOANNE. (*Pulling away from Bella.*) Bella, will you leave me alone!

BELLA. Joanne, we may need another witness. (*Running back to the window.*) Now, come on, get over here!

JOANNE. I will do no such thing.

DEDE. Bella, leave her alone, please.

BELLA. Now look girls, we don't want our spinster President of the Board to die without having once seen a gentleman's "goober"! Come on, Joanne, you get over here. (*Joanne crosses* R. *and sits behind the desk.*)

DEDE. I said cut it out, Bella! Jesus, the first time I decide to have a Board meeting in this room—the first time it is finished and ready for a Board meeting—I have to come to this $122,000 window and what do I see out of it—I see a degenerate!

BELLA. Oh, damn! He's gone. Joanne, you missed your chance. (*Suits moves* U. *then crosses to the bar* D. R. *and pours herself a drink.*)

DEDE. (*Crossing to desk.*) That settles it—I am calling the Mayor. I want bulldozers in on that whole block in the morning. I wanted that empty eyesore down a year ago— (*Crossing to the phone on the table.*) historic gargoyles or no historic gargoyles.

BELLA. Don't get so excited, Dede.

DEDE. (*Starting to dial.*) I'm calling the police.

BELLA. No!

DEDE. No, Hell!

BELLA. (*Crossing to* C.) You don't want to do that—look how disturbed Joanne is.

DEDE. Bella, I'm calling the cops!

BELLA. Dede, you don't want to ruin the First Anniversary of your New Alamo Theater. (*Crossing to Joanne.*) Any sex connected with this building has got to be very carefully thought out! And Joanne doesn't want anything happening tonight, do you Joanne?

JOANNE. Don't try your brand of twisted humor on me, Bella.

BELLA. Well, now, that's not twisted humor. (*Stepping* D.) I mean,

that man over there, he's not going to influence our lovely evening —that man doing those abhorrent things. We'll just forget him, right, Joanne?

SUITS. Lay off, Bella!

BELLA. Beatrice, why don't you go hump a cactus. (*Bella crosses* D. *and then* L. *onto the platform and again watches out the window.*)

DEDE. Watch your mouth, Bella.

JOANNE. You sent for me, Dede. Now what do you want?

DEDE. (*Crossing to desk.*) Oh, yes, I did send for you, didn't I? I sent for you. I called you up here 'cause we've got a few things to talk about.

JOANNE. You're right. But if we're going to discuss anything, I would like to do it in a polite and civilized manner.

DEDE. Why, honey, that's the only way I would like to do it too. Now. I've been hearing a lot of rumors since I got back from Muleshoe this afternoon, and apparently you harbor some dissatisfaction about me. And the thought of that hurts me, and I think we should have some kind of understanding before my entire Board of Trustees arrive in this room.

JOANNE. (*Crosses* D. R. *and hands her empty glass to Suits, who refills it.*) Dede, I'm sorry that some of "my dissatisfaction," as you call it, has drifted back to you. I wanted to tell you myself, but you weren't here and . . . Bella, will you get away from that window!

BELLA. (*Taking a step even closer to the window.*) Of course, my dear!

DEDE. I mean, if you're unhappy with my work as Artistic Director you know I'm always open to suggestions.

JOANNE. Dede, you've done some wonderful work here at the Alamo—not only in the old building, but even here in the new building.

BELLA. Then that settles it! Now Dede, I haven't told you this before; but tonight, I'm going to make a little speech—right while the Board is slicing that cake, and I'm going to tell them that we ought to change the name of this theater from the Alamo Theater to "Dede Cooper's Alamo Theater"!

DEDE. Now Bella, you're embarrassing me. (*Joanne crosses* R. *and sits at the desk.*)

BELLA. We're going to have it carved right into that marble marquee out there.

DEDE. Bella, now you stop that, now. I am turning red!

BELLA. You don't turn red at the sound of the truth. You get what you deserve. (*To Suits as she crosses to the phone on the conference table.*) Beatrice, you can put some ribs on a plate for me now. (*To Joanne.*) Oh, don't you worry Joanne. I'm keeping one eye out for the weenie waver. (*Sitting at the table and starting to dial.*) I'm going to phone this right in to the *Star* and the *Gazette*, let Grey and Lillian start leaking this item in the columns in the morning.

JOANNE. Don't call them now, Bella.

BELLA. They're going to be glad to hear this—I said I want ribs, Blimp Beatrice! (*Suits looks to Joanne who nods approval, and Suits exits* R.)

JOANNE. I said don't call them now!

BELLA. Oh, I don't think it's too late. I mean, Greg is probably sleeping in that big old canopy bed with his Mother—God only knows what Lillian is doing. Probably some chinning exercises or something. (*Suits has reentered from* R. *with a small plate of ribs. She crosses* L. *toward Bella.*)

SUITS. Greg and Lillian are downstairs watching the show. (*Suits trips when she is directly* U. *of Bella and spills the hot ribs on Bella's back. Bella begins to scream in pain as she leaps to her feet and moves* D.)

BELLA. Ouw! Ouch! These damn things are hot! (*Suits grabs a napkin from the* U. *bar and follows Bella, trying to wipe up the mess. All the time muttering apologies, "I'm sorry! I'll get it right out! I'm sorry, I really am—I'm terribly sorry!" etc.*) You stupid son-of-a-bitch! Ouw! My face wasn't bad enough, now I'm going to need derm-abrasion of my waist. Ouw! I look like I've already fallen down.

DEDE. Suits, get some water so it doesn't stain.

BELLA. Stain hell—this stuff is congealing.

JOANNE. (*Crossing to the front of the desk.*) I'll pay for the cleaning.

BELLA. Eight hundred bucks at Neiman-Marcus. Will you stop touching me, Huge Beatrice, you've got fingers like a horse's ass.

DEDE. (*Crossing to Bella.*) Will you stop drinking, Bella! You've

been pouring it in all night and I want you sober, honey. Do you hear me? I need you sober.

SUITS. (*Crossing* D. *to the door* R.) I'm sorry, Dede. I'll take care of it. All right, Joanne? (*Dede moves Bella* U. *toward the arch* R.)

JOANNE. (*Crossing* D. L. *then on to the platform.*) Anything—just get her out of here. And keep her out.

DEDE. Thanks, Suits, I appreciate it. I apologize for her—I really apologize for her. (*Suits exits.*)

BELLA. (*Stopping in the doorway.*) Dede, don't you apologize for me. I know what I'm doing—I know precisely what I'm doing around here. (*She starts to sing and does a little dance step as she exits.*) WE'RE PERFECT YOUNG LADIES! PREPARING TO MAKE— (*Dede is left alone now with Joanne. She crosses to the desk and puts on the intercom.*)

POLINA'S VOICE. We're getting old. We are no longer young, and if only we could lay aside concealment and lying for the end of our lives. . . .

DEDE. (*Crossing to* C. *and speaking over the voices coming from the intercom.*) You know, there is something different about this room. I can't put my finger on it. It just seems like there is something missing.

STAGE MANAGER'S VOICE. Warning on Light Cue eleven. Will-of-the-Wisps—Go! (*Dede crosses back and shuts off the intercom.*)

JOANNE. All right, Dede, what do you want?

DEDE. (*Moving back to* C.) I thought we should have a little chat before the reception. We don't want anything to happen tonight that's going to be a surprise for anyone in front of the entire Board of Trustees—do we?

JOANNE. (*Crossing to the desk to pick up her bag.*) Dede, I don't think we have anything to say right now. I think it would be better if I just go downstairs and finish watching the play.

DEDE. Now wait a minute, Joanne! I know you're on the warpath over money. And don't think many a time I don't wish the Alamo was back in that little old converted church with 263 seats.

JOANNE. Yes, that seemed to be just about what you could handle, didn't it?

DEDE. Now listen to me. Our money problems have nothing to do with my management of this theater. There are unions moving in on me, but we can't stop that. They're jacking up the prices on

everything and they tell my actors to go on strike. (*Crossing* L. *onto the platform.*) They talked Jennie Lee into being a union officer and that hurts me most of all because I was the one who paid for the 18 day singles cruise when her psychoanalyst got killed in that plane crash last July.

JOANNE. (*Exploding.*) You did not pay for her 18 day singles cruise! You paid for nothing! The Alamo money is not your money! It's my money, if it's anybody's! I give money to this theater, not to you! (*Crossing* L. C.) Your generosity is astounding but it's not your treasury! You're confused! (*Stepping in.*) You work here, you don't own the place!

DEDE. Baby Jesus, you're annoyed.

JOANNE. I am infuriated!

DEDE. Joanne, I know you don't mean it, but you are screaming at me.

JOANNE. You bet your life I'm screaming at you! This theater is not your personal fortune! The funds, the stage and the marble front outside are not anthropomorphosized extensions of Dede Cooper! (*Joanne crosses behind the desk and sits.*)

DEDE. Oh, now, my—that's a twenty dollar word you just ran past me and all I can say is you're all puffed up like a gusher. Joanne, I used to pack them in in the old theater, and this year we're going to have a whole lot better attendance at the New Alamo. (*Dede takes a napkin and picks up the ribs that Suits spilled.*)

JOANNE. This place is going to be as empty as it was all last year. Half-houses on weekends! There's at least 100 empty seats down there now and this is a gala opening of a new season! As of tonight Dede, you're losing the Remington Foundation grant.

DEDE. I am what?

JOANNE. You heard me.

DEDE. I am losing the Remington Foundation grant? How can I? You are the Remington Foundation grant. You're just having a little joke.

JOANNE. No, it's no joke.

DEDE. (*Crossing to* C.) Are you trying to kill me? Are you?

JOANNE. Don't you dare yell at me.

DEDE. (*Crossing to desk.*) Why not? You screamed at me. You can't take away my grant.

JOANNE. I can and I will.

DEDE. Joanne—oh, no, you cannot. That is morally wrong. Oh Joanne, I am hurt. I am really hurt and I know there must have been some misunderstanding. Joanne, what's wrong? What I'm doing for this town is what it needs. I'm bringing these people theatre! Why Joanne, I'm giving them Shakespeare and Mr. George Bernard Shaw and Miss Lillian Hellman.

JOANNE. Don't make me laugh.

DEDE. I am not trying to make you laugh! What I am trying to do is bring some of the very finest of the world's ideas to Texas City—that's what I'm trying to do and that's what I have been doing for over fourteen years!

JOANNE. Well, you're not getting another dollar out of me!

DEDE. Why now? Why now, Joanne? Why suddenly now?

JOANNE. It's not so sudden. Our little friendship of habit has been deteriorating ever since you built this perpetually half-empty wedding cake of a theater.

DEDE. Joanne, we're shooting for a 10,000 member subscription this year. Six plays for twenty bucks! We're going to have a minimum of eight week runs and if something really packs them in, we'll just run it to death on the small stage.

JOANNE. You can't run one stage—how the hell do you expect to manage two of them?

BELLA. (*Rushing in and crossing to* L. C. *Her dress is unzipped down the back.*) Joanne, your companion is refusing to rub me!

SUITS. (*Following Bella on and crossing to Joanne.*) She's saying abusive things to me, Joanne, abusive things. She tried to throw water on me!

DEDE. Come on, she says abusive things to everyone, Suits.

SUITS. I don't have to take it.

BELLA. Suits, how do simple, patent leather pumps hold you aloft?

SUITS. (*Crossing* D. R.) I don't care what she does to other people, I will not stand for it.

DEDE. Bella, go zip your dress up, come on.

JOANNE. You just help her, Suits. Close your ears and tell her to sing, "We Had A Real Nice Clam Bake."

BELLA. (*Crossing to desk.*) Oh, Clam Bake your ass! You want to hear abusive things, you wait, because you are going to hear them tonight—you are going to hear a whole lot of them.

SUITS. (*Stepping in.*) Go on! Go sing "We Had a Real Nice Clam Bake" you old drunk.

BELLA. (*Crossing* D. R.) Dede, you want me back in here you just whistle. I'll come back in here and be vulgar! (*Breaking into song and dance.*) WE HAD A REAL NICE CLAM BAKE.

SUITS. (*Exciting.*) Oh, come on, get out of here!

BELLA. (*Exciting—dancing.*) WE'RE MIGHTY GLAD WE CAME. . . .

JOANNE. The minute you left, my phone started ringing night and day. There's a demand for action, and the reason the Remington Foundation is not going to renew its grant . . .

DEDE. (*Crossing to desk.*) You're not renewing the grant! Say "You"! Joanne, you are not renewing the goddam grant!

JOANNE. Dede, there's a big difference in running a theater that has 263 seats and running one that has 1200!

DEDE. We were only a few hundred thousand in the red last year. You could write that off as a brunch!

JOANNE. Dede, in case you haven't noticed it, it's more than just a money problem. Your old staff just doesn't know what it's doing in this building.

DEDE. (*Crossing to* L. C.) Don't go talking bad about my children. I mean that! Joanne, you're telling me this because this is the kind of vengeful distortions you're planning to bring up at the reception tonight? Is that what you're planning to do? Tell the entire Board of Trustees at my reception, at my annual vote of confidence.

JOANNE. Dede, what I'm trying to tell you as nicely as you'll let me is that you're going to need help if you're going to survive down here. You're going to need someone who knows how to get this place on its feet! Who knows what they're doing. Someone who'll keep you from turning this place into Dede Cooper's personalized ghost town! (*Dede crosses* L. *and onto the platform as Shirley Fuller enters. Shirley is dressed in a coat which seems slightly out of place, but she keeps wrapping it around her as though she's got a slight chill, and she has a rather large handbag slung over her shoulder. Her hair is dramatic, in fact everything about her is dramatic, twitching, in motion. She's always "on." She smiles broadly, smokes grandly, and it is obvious her primary philosophy is that "a thing in motion would sooner catch the eye." She attempts to compensate for her clothes and accessories by doing double-time with her facial muscles. She is well-spoken,*

her voice resonant, but a fair judge of character would sense there is much tension underneath.)

SHIRLEY. Excuse me, is it all right to come in?

DEDE. Shirley? Shirley Fuller? Baby Jesus is that Shirley Fuller? That's you, isn't it? Shirley Fuller.

SHIRLEY. Yes, it's me, Dede. How are you?

DEDE. (*Crossing around to examine Shirley and ending up at the* U. *end of the desk.*) I couldn't recognize you in that outfit and your hair. How long's it been? Eight-nine years! What are you doing back here in Texas City? Joanne, this is Shirley Fuller.

JOANNE. I know it's Shirley. She's been visiting a few days.

SHIRLEY. Dede, I can't tell you what I think of the new building —and I saw a preview of your *Seagull* last night.

DEDE. You did not! Hell, I would have heard about it. I mean how could Shirley Fuller come here without there being a riot of blue-haired ladies just leaping up from the audience and saying, "Aren't you Miss Shirley Fuller? Aren't you Miss Shirley Fuller, the great actress who got herself an Academy Award Nomination!"

SHIRLEY. Oh, it's me all right, Dede.

DEDE. (*Stepping in.*) I don't understand it. I mean, I swear to God last year Miss Dakotas visited here; and she was almost trampled to death. This place goes crazy anytime there's a face they can recognize.

JOANNE. We sat in the last row.

SHIRLEY. I wore dark glasses and an absolutely horrible knitted jockey cap.

DEDE. Well, I can't believe it. I swear to God, I can't believe it. Why, we were all so proud of you, down here at the Alamo, when you got that nomination. There were headlines in both newspapers. "Former Alamo Actress up for Academy Award." What a shame you lost.

JOANNE. It was a remarkable performance.

DEDE. Remarkable! Why it was brilliant! Let me tell you, you played that part of a mean nymphomanic housewife to perfection. (*Dede kisses her fingers with a loud smack, as an expression of enthusiastic approval.*)

SHIRLEY. Dede, it's good to see you again.

DEDE. Is it really? Oh, I thought the last time we saw each other —what was it? Eight years ago?—we were screaming at each other.

SHIRLEY. You know how it is, so much depends on the circumstances.

DEDE. (*Crossing* L. *onto the platform.*) Maybe you've grown a new appreciation for our bugs and humidity.

JOANNE. (*Rising.*) Shirley, would you like a drink?

SHIRLEY. I wouldn't mind a glass of champagne. (*Joannne crosses* U. L. *to bar and opens a bottle of champagne.*)

DEDE. You really used to love champagne.

SHIRLEY. (*Crossing* U. C.) Joanne, they told me you'd come up already. And I . . . I hope I'm not too early.

JOANNE. No, just make yourself comfortable.

DEDE. By all means, make yourself right at home. And you just tell us, what are you doing down here?

JOANNE. I told you she's visiting a few days.

DEDE. Oh, yes, you did, didn't you, Joanne!

JOANNE. (*Crossing* R.) And you can cut your sarcasm.

DEDE. I didn't mean to sound sarcastic. I really didn't. And if I did, I apologize, Shirley. But I just came back from burying my Mama up in Muleshoe, and I don't have an ounce of hospitality left in me, I guess. (*Picking up the plate of ribs from the table and turning in toward Shirley.*) Would you have some ribs, Shirley?

SHIRLEY. No, thank you. Well . . . uh . . . how's Howie? That was your husband's name, wasn't it?

DEDE. Well isn't that something? It's real nice for you to remember Howie. And he's just fine. Keeps me real happy, tickled to my toes.

SHIRLEY. I remember him because we always chatted at opening night parties. He had such an unusual point of view. Is he still a member of Mensa and a Seventh Day Adventist?

DEDE. No, now he's just a Taurus and a Rosicrucian. But let me tell you his heart is going to skip two beats when I tell him ex-Academy-Award-nominee Shirley Fuller asked how he was. You never did get married yourself, did you? I mean, if any guy was lucky enough to capture your heart, I would have read about it in *People Magazine*.

JOANNE. Shirley's been looking at the facilities here, Dede.

SHIRLEY. (*Crossing* U. *of desk.*) It's quite a place. Rather startling.

DEDE. You bet it is. Big difference from the old church where you spent your season. What'd you do for us, Shirley? Ophelia, that

was it! And then you had a hell of a good part in our original musical, *Galveston Bay*, a nice chunky bit in *The House of Bernarda Alba*, and what was that suspense thing you did for us?

SHIRLEY. *Saint Joan?*

DEDE. Yeah, that was it. (*Coming off the platform and crossing to* L. C.) So what'd you think of my Chekov downstairs, huh?

SHIRLEY. Oh, I love Chekov—especially *The Seagull*. I've never had the privilege of seeing it done before as a two-act farce.

DEDE. (*Moving into* C.) Yeah, none of that tragic drab stuff. You know, Chekov said that play was a comedy, so I said—Color, Lights, Noises and Color. The hell with the birds of silence flying over. Stevie Hess, why he designed the whole thing. Oh, you remember, he's the one that did the futuristic Hamlet the season you were here.

SHIRLEY. Oh, yes. It's rather hard to forget a chrome rendering of Elsinore Castle.

DEDE. Yeah, and for this Chekov, he spent three months planting Texas Monkey Grass on four hundred wooden planks out in the back yard just so when everything all grew in we were able to bring the boards inside and make the woodsy scenes authentic. I mean, if there is one thing I've learned in all these years, it's what this town insists upon—spectacle!

SHIRLEY. Dede, we sometimes disagreed about that, didn't we? I always believed an audience had a capacity for imagination.

DEDE. But I know from experience we do one heavy, one light, then a little musical. That is the only way they're willing to put up with the classics!

JOANNE. Dede, Shirley has become active in administration lately. She set up an entire theater program at St. Matthew's College in St. Louis.

DEDE. You've got to do that when you haven't been getting work in movies or TV or any other place, don't you, Shirley?

JOANNE. How would you know why Shirley did anything?

DEDE. I know because my confidential secretary Virginia—who you have been exploiting in my absence—she has been writing to Shirley ever since Shirley left here. Now that is eight years of correspondence. She writes to Shirley Fuller, Death Row prisoners, (*Sitting on the edge of the platform.*) and Billy Graham.

JOANNE. That has nothing to do with tonight.

SHIRLEY. (*Lighting a cigarette.*) I always liked Virginia.

DEDE. Ha! I used to see the letters Shirley would write back. Hell, Virginia's so emotionally distressed she left them laying around her desk. You couldn't help but see them once in a while. She keeps your letters filed under "S" which I thought was for Shirley but Bella insists it's for schizo. (*Rising.*) Shirley, you tell me what you're doing down here. I did not invite you down here and I did not invite you to come up to this room.

SHIRLEY. (*Stepping in.*) My God, Dede. You sound frightened.

DEDE. If I am frightened, it has nothing to do with you. I wasn't afraid of you when you were down here, and I'm not afraid of you now.

SHIRLEY. You were and you are.

JOANNE. Hold it a minute.

DEDE. No. You hold it a minute. You hold it until she gets right out of here.

JOANNE. Dede, we have a few choices tonight.

DEDE. There are no choices tonight, and there are especially no choices involving Shirley Fuller.

JOANNE. Well, I say we're going to talk.

DEDE. No. We are not going to talk. Now you get her out of here!

JOANNE. Look, Dede, Shirley still has a lot of friends down here.

DEDE. Every time her name comes up, all I hear from everybody is how they still detest her, ex-Academy Award nominee or no ex-Academy-Award nominee!

SHIRLEY. (*Stepping in.*) You're the only one that detests me. Because whatever I have done has always been done with total commitment, and even if that required being detested by everyone I'd still insist on intelligence and craft and those two words have never been synonymous with Dede Cooper.

DEDE. Shirley, any movie or TV show I ever saw you in was horseshit.

SHIRLEY. (*Crossing to the desk.*) That was to pay the rent. I'm talking about the theater. I'm talking about the one thing in my life that has always been sacred.

DEDE. The theater! Ha! You haven't been near a stage in five years.

SHIRLEY. That was by choice.

DEDE. Oh, is that what it was? Why hell, I just thought it was because you were panned in London. I thought that was the whole

thing, that great big panning you got over there. That was a Moliere, wasn't it? (*Crossing* D. R.) Thinking you were just too big for America now. Now you were just going to spread yourself over the British Empire and become some kind of Dame of World Theater or something. Well, I don't suppose you'll believe this, but I was rooting for you . . . I was praying for you . . . I was wishing you the best that was in my heart.

SHIRLEY. I can imagine.

DEDE. But those English critics . . . they butchered you . . . they disemboweled you . . . a standing booing ovation.

SHIRLEY. (*Crossing to* L. C.) We were underrehearsed.

BELLA. (*Wearing tap shoes and a red flower in her hair, comes tapping in and singing.*) La La La . . . (*She dances to* C. *and sees Shirley.*) Hi, Shirley!

SHIRLEY. Hello, Bella, how are you?

BELLA. (*Without missing a beat in her dance.*) Oh terrific! You look marvelous for someone who's just been disemboweled. (*She bursts into song again.*) La La La . . . (*She exits, tapping wildly.*)

JOANNE. Dede, Shirley still has the kind of prestige we need down here.

DEDE. Now Joanne, I think you are mistaken. Shirley, I want you to get out of here right now before I start screaming; because I do not hate you . . . I really do not hate you . . . I do not want to do anything to make you feel badly. I don't want to say any of the things I am going to have to say if you stay in this room.

JOANNE. (*Rising.*) Shirley is staying for the reception tonight, whether you like it or not.

DEDE. (*Crossing to the desk.*) Now, I know the Board is not going to like it when I have to tell them about your nervous breakdown. I don't want to hurt you, Shirley; but that subject would have to come up. The Board members are old, but they are still very Texan, and they still don't understand that an event like a standing, booing ovation can push somebody over the brink.

SHIRLEY. (*Moving* U. C.) I received a little mental help at that time.

JOANNE. Shirley's never hidden that in any of her press interviews.

DEDE. But I checked out the specifics on that "little mental help" and I found out it wasn't any psychotherapeutic cerebral assistance. (*Moving into* C.) They shoved electric wires into her scalp. I felt

like crying when I heard about it. You know, I read it in your own handwriting in one of those letters you wrote to Virginia—how ashamed you felt . . . how humiliated when they moved you into shock treatments. Shock treatments! Making you bite down on a rubber bar so your teeth wouldn't crack or chew up your tongue. (*Shirley crosses* L. *to the conference table. Dede follows, but does not get up onto the platform.*) Baby Jesus, you were just a little tiny girl. I don't understand how baby Jesus can do that to a little tiny girl; I mean, a woman, a woman is something gentle and sweet. And I was taught all my life that they deserve only the good things in life, and that was my mama, gentle and sweet and tiny, and baby Jesus did terrible things to her. That little old lady, and he did that terrible thing to her.

JOANNE. Dede, I want you to cooperate with Shirley, discuss with her our vision, our plans, our goals. I want the files available to her on a full-time basis.

DEDE. I must have some terrible mastoid condition. Some thing terrible must be happening to my inner ear. I cannot believe I am hearing what I'm hearing. (*The intercom buzzes, and Joanne moves away* D. R. *Dede crosses to the desk, flicks a switch, and talks into the intercom.*) What!

BETSY'S VOICE. (*Excited.*) Mrs. Cooper, the grandiflora tree got stuck in the wings! I don't know what to do about it.

DEDE. Forget it.

BETSY'S VOICE. But the audience saw it in the first scene, and they're wondering what happened to it. The whole audience is starting to mumble.

DEDE. (*Crossing around to the back of the desk and sitting.*) All right honey, don't get excited. Did Masha roll Sorin on yet? In his wheelchair?

BETSY'S VOICE. No. They're getting ready to enter now.

DEDE. Okay. Quick! Now just give Sorin an extra line. When Masha rolls him in, you tell him to look where the grandiflora tree was supposed to be and tell him to say, "Oh my, it's too bad the woodcutters chopped down that grandiflora tree." Got it?

BETSY'S VOICE. Got it! That's terrific, Mrs. Cooper! (*Dede shuts off the intercom.*)

JOANNE. (*Crossing to* C.) Listen to me, Dede. I want you to cooperate with Shirley so that she can bring to this theater the benefit

of her experience. If you'll agree to do that, I'll also announce that the Remington Grant has been renewed.

DEDE. Oh my God! I just noticed what's missing around here. (*She bellows toward the kitchen.*) Bella, what happened to my bull's head? Bella! You get on in here! (*Pointing to an empty space on the* U. *wall.*) Now, I knew there was something missing when I came into this room, and I want to know where it is. (*Bella enters and stands* D. R. *of Dede. Shirley crosses to* C.) Bella, where's my bull's head?

BELLA. I don't know. There's a lot of old props in the closets out there, but I didn't see a bull's head . . . I'll take a better look. (*Bella exits.*)

JOANNE. (*Stepping in.*) I had it taken down.

DEDE. (*Rising.*) You had it what? Why, that was the head of the prize bull the Junior Achievement Farm Workers raised in my name.

JOANNE. Well, I'm sorry.

DEDE. Don't you ever read the papers?

JOANNE. (*To Shirley.*) See what I mean.

SHIRLEY. (*Stepping* D. L.) Oh, you bet I see what you mean. (*Bella comes charging in. She has a huge noise maker mounted on to the stock of a prop rifle. She is firing wildly and it makes a very loud noise. Everyone reacts.*) Oh my God!

BELLA. (*Crossing in to* C.) How'd you like that?

JOANNE. Bella, will you keep out of here.

BELLA. Why? I hear everything anyway.

DEDE. Bella, I don't want you keeping out of here. You've got to stay in here. Bella, I don't think I can handle this anymore.

BELLA. Well then Honey, you just take a little rest. (*Crossing to Shirley.*) Shirley, did those electric wires leave any marks on your scalp? We heard they had to shave your whole head.

JOANNE. (*To Dede who has been searching through the desk drawers.*) Dede, what in heaven's name are you looking for?

DEDE. (*Pulling out a cane-like object.*) This is what I'm looking for. Does anybody know what this is? If you've ever seen one of these before, I'll treat you all to a round at the bar during intermission, that's what I'll do.

BELLA. (*Stepping in.*) Why, it's a "goober"! A dried bull's goober!

DEDE. You're right! My husband's barber saw in the paper where

I was getting the prize bull's head on a plaque, and he managed to get the bull's goober and he did it up like this as a curiosity piece.

JOANNE. (*Crossing* D.) That is disgusting.

DEDE. (*Moving* D., *stopping Joanne.*) I thought so too, but he was so proud of it, I didn't have the heart to throw it away. Now it's kind of grown on me. He explained the whole process to me—how they soak it, they stretch it, they dried it in the sun . . . of course, they have to cut it off first . . . he said it's more complicated than shrinking a human head.

JOANNE. (*Crossing* R. *and calling out.*) Suits. Suits! Why is she staying in there? (*Dede crosses* U. *of the desk.*)

BELLA. (*Crossing to Shirley.*) Oh, God, Shirley! You should have been here before! We saw a man's goober hanging out a window across the street. That Joanne is no help at all when there's a goober hanging out a window . . . I mean, she's just no help at all.

SHIRLEY. If you'll excuse me, I'd like to freshen up. Would you mind telling we where the ladies' room is?

BELLA. Oh, just through that arch. Turn left at the tumbleweed collage.

SHIRLEY. Thank you. (*Moving* R.) Joanne, may I speak to you for a moment, please.

JOANNE. Yes, of course. (*To the others.*) Excuse me. (*They cross to the entrance* R., *just as Suits enters.*)

SHIRLEY. Oh, hello, Suits.

SUITS. Hello. (*Joanne and Shirley exit. Bella crosses onto the platform* L. *Suits moves to the bar* D. R., *and Dede crosses to the phone on the desk.*)

DEDE. (*Picking up the phone.*) Virginia, where's my bull's head? Virginia, what I want to know is, have you been a Judas to me? Virginia, don't start crying . . . come on now, Virginia, I just want to know, have you been a Judas to me? . . . Virginia, take a librium . . . take a librium.

BELLA. (*At the bar* U.) Letters, she's got letters . . . (*Suits turns to look at Bella.*)

DEDE. Virginia, now listen to me, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you're not working out as my confidential secretary . . . (*Suits turns away, and Bella crosses to Dede, trying to get her attention, but Suits turns back.*) No, now listen, I'm sorry, but I think you'll be happier back on the addressograph . . . Virginia,

please don't cry. You were so good on the addressograph. So get your stuff and get out of here! (*Suits turns away, and Bella hits the desk to command Dede's attention.*)

BELLA. S is for Schizo . . . (*Suits turns back to them, but Dede finally has the idea.*)

DEDE. Virginia . . . oh, Virginia, listen . . . all right, I'm sorry. I made a mistake. (*Bella wanders back onto the platform and stares out the window.*) You're really a wonderful confidential secretary, and you just wait in my office until I get there, will you baby? Take ten milligrams, honey. Tonight you're going to need the full ten. (*She hangs up as Joanne and Shirley enter.*)

SUITS. They're up to something.

JOANNE. Don't worry about it.

BELLA. Well everybody might as well know that there are kids over there now.

JOANNE. (*Crossing to the platform and sitting on the edge.*) Bella, what are you talking about?

BELLA. I am looking at children! There were two boys and one girl, but there is now one boy and one girl, so one of the boys has already gone upstairs to see that gentleman. The other two are still looking up and down the street to see if the coast is clear. Beatrice, did you ever have to check to see if the coast was clear?

SUITS. Bella, don't push me!

DEDE. Bella, I don't know why you're doing this.

BELLA. Just trust me, honey.

SHIRLEY. Dede, will you get her out of here. I'm sure that you and I could still work something out.

BELLA. I recognize them! There is the Brady boy . . . and who is that girl with the albino beehive? . . . Rosenschlag! (*Crossing to Joanne.*) Josephine Rosenschlag! They were both enrolled in our Saturday morning classes.

SHIRLEY. (*Crossing to Joanne.*) Joanne, would you mind telling me what is going on here?

JOANNE. When she's this drunk, you need ten men and a straitjacket.

BELLA. (*Coming off the platform and crossing directly to Shirley.*) What could you still work out with Dede, you fucking barracuda?

DEDE. Bella! Don't call Shirley that even if it's true! (*Bella crosses back onto the platform and picks up the phone.*)

JOANNE. Suits, get her some coffee and pour it down her throat.

DEDE. I'm in charge of coffee. No coffee!

SHIRLEY. Joanne, I think we should just get out of here and settle things at the board meeting. Let them act like this and they'll hang themselves tonight.

BELLA. (*Into the phone.*) Hello? . . . Are you Mrs. Rosenschlag? Well, how are you? Well, it doesn't matter who I am, but I'm one of the great philanthropists in this town.

JOANNE. Bella, hang up that phone.

DEDE. Come on now, Bella, enough is enough.

BELLA. Mrs. Rosenschlag, we just saw your daughter go into the monastery across from the New Alamo Theater. Yes! There's a man living over there.

SHIRLEY. (*Starting out.*) Joanne, I'll be waiting down at the lobby bar.

JOANNE. Wait a minute. (*Rising and crossing to Dede.*) Dede, Bella's making it impossible . . .

BELLA. He has two boys over there, and one of the boys is coupling with Josephine. Yes! I've got these binoculars here.

DEDE. Bella! There's no one on that phone! (*Yelling out.*) Don't believe her, Mrs. Rosenschlag!

BELLA. Now, I want you to get up here, and bring guns, and your husband, all his friends, and like I said, lots and lots of guns. (*Bella hangs up, as Dede crosses* D. *of the desk.*)

JOANNE. (*Moving into* C.) Bella, look. You can turn it off now because I know what you're up to and it's not going to make the least bit of difference. Dede knows that as well as you do. Let's get this thing settled before the Board members walk in here.

DEDE. Joanne, I still don't want Shirley in this room.

SHIRLEY. (*Stepping* D.) But I am here, Dede, I am here.

BELLA. (*Waving her arms grandly.*) Well, poof to you. Poof! You're not here!

SUITS. Shut up, Bella!

BELLA. And a big fat poof to you!

JOANNE. Shirley is staying for the reception whether you or Bella or anyone likes it.

DEDE. I not only don't want her in this room, I don't want her in this building.

SHIRLEY. (*Crossing to Joanne.*) Let's get to something she can understand.

JOANNE. Shirley is going to do what has to be done.

DEDE. I'm not going to let Shirley do anything.

SHIRLEY. Joanne, tell her . . . now! Tell her! Let's just lay it right out there for her.

JOANNE. Shirley is going to be Co-Director of the Alamo. (*Dede takes a moment to comprehend what has just been said.*)

DEDE. You're joking. That is one hell of a good joke. Shirley Fuller couldn't be Co-Director of the annual gopher hunt. (*At a signal from Joanne, Shirley moves behind the desk with her attache case and begins taking out papers.*)

JOANNE. Dede, you're going to announce tonight that Shirley will be joining you.

DEDE. (*Crossing to* L. C.) Oh, My God, Bella! Look at that! Look at that! They have got papers, documents, copies of things!

BELLA. I'm sorry, Dede—I need a drink. (*She crosses to the* U. *bar, pours a drink, and goes back and sits in a chair* D. *of the table.*)

DEDE. (*Crossing* C.) I'll bet you've got everything all nice and neat and legal just like New York.

JOANNE. This is called professional, Dede.

DEDE. Oh Joanne, I would hate to make a fool of you at the meeting tonight. You are not a professional theater person.

JOANNE. Shirley can talk your language.

DEDE. Shirley! Shirley! Shirley! I don't want to hear that name! (*Crossing to the desk.*) I want you out of this room! You get out of here!

JOANNE. (*Moving* D.) Dede, if your cooperate you can go right on staying at the Alamo. You just won't be running things alone. You can still keep your portrait in the lobby holding yellow roses.

DEDE. (*Crossing to the platform and sitting on the edge.*) Bella, what are they trying to do to me? Slice me in half!

SHIRLEY. These are Xerox copies of Alamo records which prove the flagrant misuse of funds. The figures have been verified by the Alamo accountant and double-checked by an outside CPA.

BELLA. What misuse of funds?

SHIRLEY. The evidence is all here.

BELLA. I asked you something, you mean, nymphomaniac housewife.

SHIRLEY. I couldn't care less what you asked me! I'm not going to have any trouble bouncing a volunteer drunk from the Children's

Acting School. You are an appendage that gets a little quick surgery.

BELLA. I am not an appendage, and I am not a drunk. I might on occasion walk into a saloon, lift up the edge of the bar and drink whatever runs to the corner; but I'd hardly call that a drunk.

DEDE. (*Rising and crossing* to C.) Those are my checks.

SHIRLEY. These are Alamo checks with your signature on them. Even the Board of Trustees can see in a minute how you managed to make this bunker cost a million more than it should have.

DEDE. This town wanted the best and that's what I gave them.

SHIRLEY. What you gave them looks like out-and-out embezzlement.

DEDE. I never wasted a dollar. Not a dollar.

SHIRLEY. Who are you kidding? Thirteen hundred and twenty-six dollars to Mike McCloud—an assistant stage manager!

DEDE. That was for his teeth. When Mikey McCloud came up here from Corpus Cristi he was nineteen, and he had no teeth. He had no teeth and his gums went bad and when he'd come to my office he was so ashamed he couldn't look a person in the eye.

JOANNE. The Alamo funds are not for your charitable whims.

DEDE. Mikey McCloud is a human being! Most of those are loans the kids are going to pay back. You know, we don't pay enough if they need an appendectomy or their tonsils out.

SHIRLEY. You had the stage made out of cement so you can have real rain on stage, but you can't use it because the water falls from such a height that it splashes the first eight rows like a porpoise show.

DEDE. I'm not stupid. I know how to correct that and it won't cost much money. We're the only theater in the Southwest that can have real rain.

SHIRLEY. Your bartenders in the lobby are robbing you blind during the intermissions.

DEDE. My kids are not crooks!

SHIRLEY. And your box office staff is pulling every trick in the book.

DEDE. You don't like human beings, that's your trouble. Baby Jesus, she doesn't like human beings!

SHIRLEY. You've committed budget disasters in set-building, lighting equipment, casting, front of the house, and back of the house. You fly newspaper people down here and you think it's

some kind of appreciation for your directorial ingenuity when they go back and write tongue-in-cheek reviews about how many live pigs you used in your production of *Tobacco Road!* You don't apply to the right foundations or the Alamo wouldn't have to depend so much on the Remington Grant. You should have had the Ford Foundation in your pocket years ago.

BELLA. Fuck the Ford Foundation! Hell, if you did that, you might get a grant!

JOANNE. Dede, I've come to the conclusion that you're a born amateur.

DEDE. Joanne, that is a terrible thing to say about me. (*Crossing to* C.) If you want to discuss figures, you go ahead, but I do not want to be hit below the belt.

JOANNE. The little girl from Muleshoe smiling her way into the big time.

DEDE. There is nothing wrong with a human being smiling.

JOANNE. (*Crossing to* C.) Let me tell you, I find you deplorable; and there's no point in hiding it anymore. You belong in the small time, that's where you belong. It's gotten so I am repelled at just being near you!

DEDE. I am a human being.

JOANNE. You are an embarrassment! There's something big at stake here and you don't belong in this building.

DEDE. I am an embarrassment? Don't say anything like that, Joanne.

JOANNE. How do you think I feel having to turn around and face up to the fact that what I've been backing for years is a rank amateur? I've been pouring money in to let you do your little thing down here. (*She crosses around the desk and returns to* C.) You're terrified of anybody who's professional. This theater can't get any further in the hands of anyone like you!

DEDE. I can't believe my President of the Board is talking like this. I mean, all you ever said at Board meetings was let's do things micely . . .

JOANNE. What I find most despicable about you is that you've turned this theater into your club.

DEDE. This is my life! This is my life!

JOANNE. This is a nice little situation where there's never going to be any friction, where the status quo is maintained instead of going for something bigger. It's the same with all these cultural

institutions I support. You're threatened by talent because a good idea might make its way in somehow!

DEDE. What do you know about talent! What do you know about talent!

JOANNE. You steamroller right over everyone around here so only the most pathetic of sycophants survive. Whoever heard of putting Texas Monkey Grass in a Chekov play! You're a national joke! You are ridiculous!

DEDE. I am not ridiculous. My life means something.

SHIRLEY. You are an amateur!

DEDE. I am not.

JOANNE. And Dede, tonight every member of the Alamo Board is going to know in spades that you're an amateur. You are crude! No matter how much you paint your nails there's still dirt under them. You're someone I will no longer tolerate!

DEDE. (*Bursting into tears.*) You cannot just slip me into a rubber bag. You cannot bury me alive. (*For a moment her tears overcome her and she stands helpless. Even Bella doesn't know what to do, as Dede fights to regain control of herself. Then, slowly, as if drawing upon some deep indomitable well of courage she halts crying and defiantly looks at her watch. Summoning up all the strength she can, she pulls herself together and stares at her enemies. With a supreme act of will she crosses to the desk and switches on the intercom.*)

TRIGORIN'S VOICE. I am coming. What is it?

MADAME ARKADIN'S VOICE. We are staying.

NINA'S VOICE. It's a dream.

STAGE MANAGER'S VOICE. Curtain coming in. Light cue #27 —go! House lights up. (*There is audience applause until Dede shuts off the intercom.*)

DEDE. (*Crossing to* U. C.) Well, if you'll excuse me—I have some social graces to perform during the intermission, some hands to shake, some friends to see. There are folks who expect to see me in my lobby on my opening night. But I'll be back. I'll be back. (*Dede exits majestically. There is a moment and then Bella starts to cross* U. C.)

BELLA. If you ladies will pardon me, I'm gonna dance with the one who brung me. (*Bella does a "bump" in the direction of the others and then exits as the curtain falls.*)

ACT TWO

THE MASSACRE

About ten minutes have gone by. Suits is alone on the platform L. *She is smoking a cigarette and gazing out the window.*

The intercom is on and we hear the sounds of the audience at intermission.

Bella enters from U. *with her usual glass of bourbon.*

BELLA. Don't you just wonder what he's doing over there with all those children. (*Bella crosses to the desk and shuts off the intercom.*)

SUITS. (*Busying herself with her papers on the* U. *end of the table.*) No, I don't wonder. I wasn't looking over there.

BELLA. (*Crossing* D. R. *to refresh her drink.*) Well, I thought you were, the way you were plunked smack in that window instead of downstairs enjoying the intermission. Where are the others? I didn't see them hobknobbin' down there.

SUITS. None of your business.

BELLA. Oh, you've been assigned to guard the base? Hold the high ground and pee on the campfires. (*Crossing to* R. C.) Come on, where are the troops?

SUITS. (*Crossing to the* D. R. *end of the desk.*) Shirley wanted to fix herself up in the dressing room, and Joanne took a walk. I think she thought it would be a good idea if Shirley had a chance to be alone with Dede when she comes back up.

BELLA. (*Stepping* D. C.) Well, if they're going to be alone it sure makes me wonder where I should be . . . in church or some place.

SUITS. Offhand I'd say nobody'd miss you if you went and did what you usually do—why don't you go fall down some place?

BELLA. (*Moving* U.) Beatrice, you know that loaf of bread you used to bake and present to me on opening nights—I consistently threw it into the alley for the cockroaches. (*Crossing to the desk.*) Tell me, did you jump much rope as a child?

SUITS. Bella, if you don't watch your mouth around me . . .

BELLA. Oh, good! I love it when you get angry. You would have made a fortune wrestling.

SUITS. (*Crossing around* U. *and into* C.) At least I knew the limitations of my acting ability. The gasps I hear in the audience these days when you come on stage of pure shock at seeing an aging character woman still trying to play an ingenue.

BELLA. (*Moving* D.) Your only thespian limitation was that while on stage, you tended to sound like a deep sea mammal, and look like ten pounds of shit in a five pound bag.

SUITS. Bella, I'm warning you!

BELLA. What are you warning me about?

SUITS. I could dump you in a New York minute, and you know it.

BELLA. (*Lunging at Suits.*) Oh, you come on—you brace yourself, I'm going to run against you, ricochet off your belly, and bounce off the back wall like a cannonball.

SUITS. (*Stepping in.*) Bella, I think you know very well what I'm going to do if you don't back off.

BELLA. Now what are you going to do? Are you going to allude to my promiscuity? Some impropriety you may have seen while barging into one of my various star dressing rooms. (*Turning away.*) Beatrice, everyone already knows I'm the "Town Bang." (*Shirley enters* R., *as Suits crosses to the* U. *bar.*) Oh, aren't we lucky! Here's the Town Star! The Town Star who's going to find it so easy to dispose of the Town Bang.

SHIRLEY. (*Crossing to the desk and putting her papers into her attache case.*) At the rate you're going, you'll be unconscious before the reception so we can roll you under the conference table.

SUITS. Watch her, Shirley. She's good at playing loaded.

BELLA. I understand you're staying in Room 219 at Howard Johnson's 28 Flavors. I personally found that shocking. I mean, I said to myself—now why isn't she staying in the mansion with Joanne and the other old maids.

SHIRLEY. (*Crossing* L.) Where's Dede?

BELLA. Oh, she's just downstairs . . . (*Suits crosses* D., *touching Shirley who completes her cross to the platform.*) reading a few old letters and Xeroxing her ass off. You know, if I were you, I'd be more worried about why Beatrice hasn't been relating to you all night. I don't hear any of that adorable, enchanting ebullience that was eight years ago.

SUITS. (*Crossing to the* R. *exit.*) If you'll excuse me—

BELLA. (*Stopping her.*) You're not excused, you paunchy Peter Pan! Now, just hold it! Shirley, I asked you a question. You and Beatrice were such good friends. Why, ever since you left, nobody even talks to this poor lonesome ex-Port Arthur hippo.

SUITS. (*Turning and moving in on Bella.*) Don't you call me lonesome, you stinking Cajun swamp.

BELLA. Oh, Thank God, the hippo part's all right.

SHIRLEY. Don't pay any attention to her, Suits.

SUITS. (*Crossing to Bella.*) Perhaps you ought to go fix your face. See if there isn't something you can do to cover all those ruptured capillaries. (*Crossing to Shirley.*) She's got a husband who'd rather puke than touch her, and her son's always known that she's a selfish shit.

BELLA. That does it! You're ready for a match now. Come on—two out of three's the winner.

SUITS. (*Backing Bella to* C.) Any time you want to face pure right-on ugliness, honey—I will show you what it's really like!

SHIRLEY. Suits, go down and watch the rest of the play. Or take a walk. You're doing just what she wants. Tell Joanne I told you to. Go ahead.

SUITS. I think I better stay here with you.

SHIRLEY. I'm telling you it's all right. (*After a beat, Suits starts to exit* U. C.)

BELLA. (*Crossing* D. L.) You all watch out you don't catch a bullet up your ass. I mean in this town you've got to be careful about what you say. (*Sitting on the edge of the platform.*) The Superintendent of Schools shot her husband because he made a crack about the way she pickled watermelon rind and she didn't do a day in jail.

SUITS. I'd think about that if I were you. (*Suits exits, and Shirley crosses off the platform to the* U. *bar and pours herself a glass of wine.*)

SHIRLEY. Well, I see you still manage to be amused by violence. I remember you always found it so entertaining when somebody got shot in the head at one of the local bars. (*She crosses to the desk and lights a cigarette.*)

BELLA. Oh! You said that just like a saint, just like a sweet little saint!

SHIRLEY. Did I?

BELLA. Yep! All composed, the cover right on. A big difference

from when we rented those one bedroom garden apartments from that fruit of a landlord who sang at funerals.

SHIRLEY. I'm flattered that you remember such details. You make it sound like my season here was the highlight of your life.

BELLA. I especially remember the pool in the courtyard. And all those little chameleons running up and down the ivy—the day you grabbed a chameleon by its tail—what a yell you let out when it disembodied itself, and you were left holding nothing but a wiggly tail.

SHIRLEY. Which seems to be about all you're left with now.

BELLA. Touche! Shirley sweets, let me tell you some thing—you're not going to win tonight! You understand me? Not win.

SHIRLEY. Virginia did write to me when you finally got married. I was thrilled to hear about it. I'm sorry your marriage has turned out to be . . . fraudulent.

BELLA. (*Rising and crossing* U. C.) Oh Louie and I are fabulously happy. You don't have to talk to me any more like I'm that poor little Louisiana Thrush who just flew in to Texas City with a bastard son to warble at the Pink Elephant Bar. I'll have you know, my son is now seventeen years old, and he's studying in Switzerland. And for his birthday next month, Louie is buying him a Mercedes Benz with a horn that plays, "My Texas 'Tis of Thee." There are only two Mercedes this big in the world. One goes to our son, and the other one belongs to the Pope. (*Moving* D.) I don't know what his horn plays.

SHIRLEY. I was told your husband's wealth has a certain fluctuation to it.

BELLA. (*Crossing slowly* D. R. *to get her checkbook from her purse.*) When Louie and I go to the Houston Rodeo, we carry a couple of dozen glittering Western outfits which we transport in our matching, his and hers Continentals—mine is gold, his is zebra. And my Louie's got twenty-three million bucks, course he owes thirty-six million bucks, but until those two little things start catching up to each other, I'm not going to worry. (*Crossing to the desk.*) Now, how much do you want to walk out that door?

SHIRLEY. (*Crossing to* C.) No, thank you.

BELLA. Now listen, I want you out of here. I don't have the money to buy the Alamo for Dede, but I've got enough to take care of small pickings like you.

SHIRLEY. Why would you really give me money—you know, not everybody does what they do for money.

BELLA. Well, then how come you did all those shitty, *Gunsmokes?* Come on, you take and run.

SHIRLEY. Bella, you don't really think I'd take a bribe do you? (*Crossing* D. R.) Thanks, but no thanks.

BELLA. (*Crossing* C.) Thanks, but no thanks, eh?

SHIRLEY. That's right. (*Bella moves* D. *then* L. *onto the platform. She looks out the window.*)

BELLA. Oh, Jesus! There's another boy going in over there. It must be a full moon. Every place I look somebody's getting a screwing. (*Dede enters briskly carrying a folder under her arm, as well as a hammer and a bag of nails.*)

DEDE. All right, where the hell's my bull's goober—where is it?

BELLA. Dede, there's another boy over there!

DEDE. Listen, I asked you, where is my bull's goober?

BELLA. I tell you, there's another kid over there.

DEDE. And I asked for my goober!

BELLA. (*Taking the goober from the table and bringing it to Dede.*) Here—for crying out loud! That invert is perverting those young adults.

SHIRLEY. Dede, will you get rid of her.

DEDE. Bella, forget that window! That's got nothing to do with us right now.

BELLA. Yes, it does!

DEDE. The perversion's going on in here! (*Dede hammers a nail into the desk and hangs the bull's goober from it. Meanwhile Bella crosses onto the platform and starts looking up a number in the phone book.*) There! That's going to stay there and nobody's going to move it. I don't care who likes it and who doesn't like it. That is from my prize bull and it's going to swing there until the head shows up. Now, Bella, you get out of here, 'cause Shirley and I are going to have a little pow-wow, aren't we, Shirley?

BELLA. (*Picking up the phone.*) I don't think that those Rosenschlags are going to show up with their shotguns. I'm going to call the Brady boy's father. I know that boy is over there with that invert. We'll let all those vicious Irish people take care of him.

DEDE. (*Crossing to Bella.*) Bella, now you heard me. You know, I'm beginning to lose my patience with you.

BELLA. Oh, now Dede, you need me at the window. Joanne

doesn't like the window. And I think Shirley's got a little touch of aversion to it, too.

DEDE. You go lay down.

BELLA. (*Putting down the phone and coming off the platform.*) All right, maybe I could do with a little rest—or a Singapore Sling. Maybe I'll have a little rest *and* a Singapore Sling.

DEDE. Beat it, Bella!

BELLA. (*Crossing* D. *and stretching out on the edge of the platform.*) All right. You just call me if you hear any gunshots or screaming, will you?

DEDE. Not in here, Honey! On the couch in the powder room.

BELLA. All right, I can take a hint! (*She rises and crosses* R., *and starts to sing.*) YOU CALL EVERYBODY, DARLIN' (*As she passes the* D. R. *bar, she grabs a bottle of bourbon from the bar and takes it off* R. *with her.*) La La La . . . (*Bella exits as Dede crosses to the desk, flicks a switch on the intercom and then goes* D. R. *to pour herself some bourbon. Shirley crosses to the front of the desk, listens to the play for a moment, then shudders and crosses* L.)

MEDVEDENKO'S VOICE. How dark it is in the garden! We ought to have told them to take down that stage in the garden. It stands as bare and ugly as a skeleton, and the curtain flaps in the wind like a ghost. When I passed it yesterday evening, I thought I heard the sound of someone crying. (*Dede crosses to the desk and shuts off the intercom.*)

SHIRLEY. (*Crossing to* C.) Dede, I really think you and I should consider working together. You have a lot of vigorous Texas qualities that are important for getting things done. I don't deny that. (*Crossing* L.) And I could only be here for a year at the most.

DEDE. (*Crossing* D. *of the desk.*) What you want is to make it politely through tonight—sail in under any colors—your foot in the door. In a week I'd be skinned alive and you'd dig in like a wart.

SHIRLEY. Dede, you can believe this or not, but I have been offered a lot of other work. I've been asked to do a play in New York. But frankly, I prefer to stay here.

DEDE. Shirley, I am a person with feelings. Now I'm not feeling well tonight, and I have to appeal to your sense of decency. I am shaking now. I just feel like Joanne has set a whole string of traps

for me this evening, and I don't know when the teeth of the next one are going to snap closed on my leg.

SHIRLEY. Because she wants something, Dede. She wants someone to see that this theater is run correctly.

DEDE. Well, you aren't the lady for the job, let me tell you that.

SHIRLEY. Would it be that much more difficult to think of me as a woman. I mean, would you be comfortable with the word "woman" at this point.

DEDE. Shirley, I know what it must be like to have a nervous breakdown.

SHIRLEY. I doubt it.

DEDE. I know you thought I was insensitive and that I didn't know beans about real actors and great theater. And maybe you were right. That's why I stopped acting.

SHIRLEY. (*Stepping in.*) You stopped acting after our little experience working together in *The House of Bernarda Alba*. That's why you stopped acting.

DEDE. I have to ignore the hate you have for me.

SHIRLEY. I don't hate you!

DEDE. Because I understand your circumstances. I know my acting limitations carried right over into directing because I felt more comfortable using conventional actors that do things by the numbers.

SHIRLEY. You were playing Martirio and I was Adela. You didn't even know you had cast yourself in the part of the ugly daughter.

DEDE. When you came down here I knew I wasn't in your class. You'd come to rehearsal and have your nerve endings hanging out, you were willing to bring in any pain you had in your real life just for the sake of making the character real. (*Shirley crosses* U.) You stood out like a sore thumb.

SHIRLEY. Two days before opening, you came up to me and told me Lorca wouldn't care if Martirio was pretty and I told you it was in the lines that she was a hunchback.

DEDE. (*Crossing* R.) It used to give me chills when you'd really play a scene.

SHIRLEY. (*Stepping* D.) On opening night, you came out in front of that audience just as erect and demure as can be until I turned to you—when you were finally looking at me—and I said the lines exactly as they had been written by the author—"Don't look at me like that! If you want, I'll give you my eyes, for they're

younger, and my back to improve that *HUMP!!!* . . ."—and you bent down and you played the rest of that run as the ugly daughter you were supposed to be!

DEDE. Well, you're right! (*Shirley crosses* D. L.) I have never wanted to play an ugly or unkind person on a stage because I'm not that way inside. Inside I'm just plain and ordinary and that's all I ever told I was every day of my life. (*Shirley sits on the edge of the platform.*) If you were raised in Muleshoe you probably would have ended up just as ordinary as I am. Not that there aren't any virtues in being ordinary because you can't have a world full of people that go around mentally collapsing all over the place. Oh, I think you are a genius at what you do. It's like you got smart by being dipped in blood or something. Like someone stuck a thousand knives in you when you were a little kid. (*Slowly crossing to Shirley.*) I can understand that a little better now because when they were turning them cranks and lowering my mama into the ground I felt like I could walk on any stage, I could do any part and I could break anybody's heart. But the only way I could survive it would be if I was playing some other character and doing something else with my pain and making believe it wasn't my own. Otherwise I would go insane. What I'm trying to say to you is, I'm sorry for not understanding your talent—the kind of hurt you must have had to carry inside you to give those performances that would make people's hair stand on end—but now you've got to be a better person now than to come down here and to take advantage of me when I don't have the strength, when my mind is exaggerated on the subject of death and dying and picking coffins and white satin pillows for my mama's head and I haven't had enough time to fool myself into thinking this place is worth fighting for. Oh, Shirley, what I'm asking you to do is just to go away and leave me alone. (*Sitting down beside Shirley.*) I've done the best I could here. I've been the best kind of person I could and this place is my life and I deserve to keep it. If you want to go after it, I'm just asking you not tonight. I mean, please excuse me for at least tonight for not being able to defend myself. (*Shirley crosses* U. C. *in silence.*)

SHIRLEY. (*Turning to Dede.*) Dede, I'm going to take everything.

DEDE. Why?

SHIRLEY. Because the longer I'm in this room with you, the more I know I *can*. Dede, you are a dinosaur.

DEDE. Why, now you're not being very nice, and you are beginning to force me to be not so nice. (*She rises, crosses to the front on the desk and picks up the folder that she brought into the room.*) Now, I have here some Xerox copies of letters which you wrote to Virginia. And I have some other information. Now, Shirley, I don't want to do anything like this, and I just wish you would turn around, and get out of here.

SHIRLEY. You're not going to bluff me out of this room.

DEDE. I was very disappointed I couldn't find one letter I remember reading a couple of years ago. You remember when you wrote to Virginia when you thought there was this maniac who was trying to mutilate you. I wonder, do you remember that? You know something about how you would wake up in the night, and this man would be at the bottom of your bed with his hands around your legs.

SHIRLEY. You're out of your mind.

DEDE. Shirley, don't make me force you to look at your mental illness. I don't want to do that, but I am desperate. Now I just wish that you would turn around and walk out of here, and stop me from doing this.

SHIRLEY. I'm here to stay, and get that straight!

DEDE. Well, I have here a couple of letters where you were playing one-night stands, and after every performance you wrote Virginia how you'd run off the stage and shake hands with the members of the audience, especially the gentlemen members because you were so desperate for love that you couldn't stop crying. (*Shirley laughs and crosses* L. *Dede follows.*) And there are rather detailed encounters here of these gentlemen, you know, the steel workers and the conventioneers in Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C. and all the humiliating things that you did. And you wrote Virginia that it was penance, that you were paying penance. (*She pauses to let it all sink in.*) Old letters are kind of like dreams, aren't they, Shirley? After just a little while you forget what happened in them, even though you wrote them yourself. Now here's your set. (*She hands a set of stapled Xerox copies of letters to Shirley, and then crosses to* C.) And I am sick, and I am ashamed, and I am not very proud of myself, but I'm going to hand copies to the members of the Board when they walk in that door. I will hand them their copies just as soon as you and Joanne hand out your packets of poison against me. (*Crosses* D. R.) Now turn around, Shirley, and

walk out that door, and don't make me do anything like this. (*Joanne enters* U. C. *and crosses to* R. C.)

JOANNE. Well, Dede, I hope you and Shirley have managed to reach an understanding. I was sure if you had a chance to go over things you'd see you could work nicely together. What have you decided?

DEDE. Well, it isn't so much what I decided, but I think that Shirley has decided to leave.

SHIRLEY. (*Turning in.*) No, I'm not leaving.

JOANNE. (*Crossing to desk, and putting her bag down.*) Then it's not going to work out. Is that what you're saying? Maybe you just need a few days to think things over.

DEDE. Work out? How many meetings did you have with her! What did you do? Fly up to New York and have a long lunch at the Plaza? Did you ever bother to check poor Shirley's references. Did you? Did you ever call St. Matthew's? I don't need your letters, Shirley. I just thought they might cheer you up. Get you in the mood for what's coming. Now, I am giving you one last chance. Walk out that door!

SHIRLEY. No.

DEDE. I called St. Louis during intermission. I spoke to some straight-shooting nun up there who leveled with me about the great theatrical program Shirley installed for them.

SHIRLEY. (*Crossing to the* U. *bar to get her bag and then to Joanne.*) Actually, Joanne, I really don't see any point in my staying in this room and listening to this fiction. I'll be at the motel. You can announce to the Board that she is out—and I can be introduced under more dignified circumstances.

JOANNE. Please stay put so we know everything she's got. Then I'll just need your face for a minute at the meeting.

DEDE. You bet she'd better stay put. Otherwise we'll get Sister Joseph back on the line again now! (*Shirley crosses* D. L.) Our little Shirley spent a month in an office up there, she ordered some posters and leaflets. Did all the casting on the phone. That's how good an ear she had. Demanded to be paid in advance. On the morning of the first day of rehearsal some students and a couple of nuns had to break down the door to her campus apartment because she was unconscious from an overdose of *Southern Comfort*. Later that night she appeared at a meeting with the powers-that-be wearing her coat, like she's wearing now, and they could see she

wasn't wearing anything underneath it. And when she put down her pocketbook it made a big jangle because it was packed with *Budweiser* nips! Specifically, five *Budweiser* nips and a full-size can of *Miller High Life*.

SHIRLEY. She is making this up out of some kind of revenge. Pardon me, I'd like to use the powder room. (*She starts for the door* R.)

DEDE. (*Blocking Shirley's way.*) Hold it, honey. If that was your style two months ago, let's get a look at you now! (*Dede makes a rush for Shirley and tries to tear open her coat.*)

SHIRLEY. Don't you touch me!

JOANNE. Keep your hands off her! (*Shirley pushes Dede aside, knocking her off balance and onto the floor in* C. *As Dede goes down she pulls Shirley's bag off her shoulder.*)

DEDE. (*Spilling the contents of the bag onto the floor.*) We'll see what she's got here.

SHIRLEY. How dare you! (*Shirley makes a dive for a container of pills, but Dede pulls them away before Shirley can get to them.*)

DEDE. Well, she's off the nips and into these. (*Getting up and crossing to Joanne.*) She's always got something to glue her together for a couple of hours. Then it's heebee jeebee time, isn't that right, Shirley?

SHIRLEY. (*Still on the floor picking up her belongings.*) Those are tranquilizers.

JOANNE. So she's got tranquilizers. Why everybody in this theater is on transquilizers or alcohol. Or both.

DEDE. This says Thorazine. Fifty or sixty big capsules of Thorazine.

SHIRLEY. That is a tranquilizer, you stupid ass.

DEDE. For what? A psychotic elephant? (*Dede crosses onto the platform* L., *as she passes, Shirley makes another attempt to get the pills, but Dede is too fast for her.*) I'm telling you, if you want this looney at the meeting, I'm going to see they put you in the bug house for bringing her down here.

JOANNE. Shirley makes more sense than anything you ever said or did in your whole life. I'll put her in charge of this theater without you. You'll be out altogether.

DEDE. Then let me advise you that tonight in front of everybody I'm going to carve the two of you up like chili peppers.

JOANNE. No matter what you stoop to invent or drag out, that

Board will act on what I tell them. They'll trust me and Shirley, not a back-country amateur.

SHIRLEY. Amateur is too kind! (*Suddenly there's a loud animal-like sound and* R. *is a very bizarre sight of Bella holding Dede's missing bull's head. Bella charges into the room chasing Shirley and Joanne with the horns of the bull, making even louder, growling noises. Joanne flees behind the desk, and Shirley moves away* L. *Suits follows Bella into the room, but remains in the doorway.*)

SUITS. She's a crazy son-of-a-bitch! A sick, crazy, son-of-a-bitch! An alcoholic amnesiac! That's what she is! An alcoholic amnesiac! (*Bella hangs the bull's head on its hook on the* U. *wall. She gives it a pat and a kiss on the snout before leaving it.*)

SHIRLEY. (*Crossing to the desk.*) This is not a theater! This is a play pen! She's been running a kindergarten on your money, but that's all over now!

DEDE. Bella, did you hear what Joanne called me again?

BELLA. What?

DEDE. An amateur.

BELLA. Oh, she did call you that, didn't she? I remember that. At least nobody called you an alcoholic amnesiac. That's what Beatrice-the-Bouncer called me.

JOANNE. Bella, will you get out of this building before I call the police!

BELLA. What, is she kidding?

JOANNE. No, I'm not kidding.

BELLA. (*Crossing to the desk.*) Why, honey, I don't desert my friends.

JOANNE. No, but you . . . fuck their husbands.

BELLA. (*After a beat.*) Why, Joanne, you cursed. You actually cursed.

JOANNE. There's something contaminating just being near you. (*She picks up her purse and removes a sealed envelope from it as she crosses to Dede. Handing the envelope to Dede.*) Here's some information, the name of the hotel clerk and so forth. Wednesday of this week to be specific.

BELLA. (*Crossing to* C.) She's a liar, Dede! She's a God Damn liar! Me and Howie—that is ridiculous, that's absurd!

DEDE. Bella, is she telling me the truth?

BELLA. (*After a beat.*) Dede, it was no big deal. (*Joanne crosses back behind the desk and sits. Bella crosses to Dede.*) If anything

did happen, it wasn't Howie's fault. We were both loaded, he just thought we were going out for fried chicken. I didn't do it to hurt you.

DEDE. Well, what did you think it would do to me?

BELLA. Dede, I'm sorry.

DEDE. You stabbed me in the back with this pack of sharks circling around me, and you say you're sorry.

BELLA. I said I didn't mean to.

DEDE. Like hell you didn't mean to. Everything you do, you mean to. You said so yourself. You would have made a play for this theater yourself wouldn't ya, if I'd ever given you half a chance.

BELLA. Why Dede, I have never been jealous of you. Honey, listen, she's deliberately trying to turn you against me. Give me a black eye tomorrow, but not tonight, Dede, not tonight.

DEDE. You never tell me what to do! Never!

BELLA. Dede, you are doing just what she wants.

DEDE. My mama's in the grave. I've got a secretary who is a traitor. You, Suits, you're a spy. And you, my wonderful President of the Board whom I've respected and looked up to for all these years, you want to take my life away, and I've got a best friend for an assassin. Well, it looks like all you've got to do now is bury me.

SUITS. Dede, I'm sorry. I never wanted to . . .

BELLA. You shut up, you big, fat eggplant! (*Bella sits on the edge of the platform.*)

DEDE. I feel like some kind of teeth are . . . (*She looks at her situation.*) How the hell did I get knocked off without even blowing off a few heads? I mean, I've been ambushed and massacred, and I wasn't even looking. But, you know, I feel like I'm not the only one biting the dust. I look at the pack of you, and I am not the only one going down. There is some kind of slow, drawn-out butchering, and that's what's been going on! How the hell can there have been a massacre and I didn't even notice it?

JOANNE. (*Taking a step toward Dede.*) Dede, I . . .

DEDE. No, don't move near me! I mean, when so many people around you hate you so much, well it's time to take personal stock, right? I mean, so many people can't be wrong. Right? (*Crossing to* C.) I mean, if you all hate me so much, there better be a few reasons. Right? To say I'm not liked would be the understatement of the year. Why . . . Oh God, I must be a monster. And if I am

a monster, then I don't know what that makes the rest of you, but you're not exactly ladies-aiming-to-please, let me tell you that! Now that is a remembrance, isn't it? That is a funny remembrance! The concept of ladies. You know, somewhere inside of me, underneath all of whatever this is you say I am, whatever all this is that you hate so much, there seems to be some little ole girl, just waiting for the gentlemen cavalry to charge on my behalf. And wouldn't you think I'd have gotten it through my head by now, no cavalry is ever going to charge in to save me on any battle field, much less this bunker as you call it. It's just us girls out here. And did you ever stop to think why is it just us girls? I mean, something went berserk. It's not just us ladies who have been transformed, disfigured, is it? I mean, whatever happened to the gentlemen who so lived off the sense that they were capable of great things? It's inside my own head, if you ask me, that all these years I have been an embarrassment, I have thought of myself as an embarrassment. (*She breaks down.*) It is inside my own head that I have been ridiculous, that I have felt ridiculous. And it is inside my own head that everything you've said about me tonight is true, and it always was true. I have been an amateur.

JOANNE. (*Moving* D.) I think you can get out of here, Bella.

BELLA. You want me out, Dede?

DEDE. Do I want you out? What? Out the door? Knocked out? Do I want one of the metamorphosized ladies to depart? Huh? You didn't know I knew a goddam word like that, did you, Joanne? Metamorphosized, huh? Do I want my favorite metamorphosized lady, who took my poor Howie out for fried chicken, but put something else on the table . . . why it seems like that would be the obligatory scene. Well, I guess I knew the risks of having a tramp for a friend from the beginning. But let me tell you somethin', next to the rest of you girls in this room, I still find Bella Gardner is a perfect young lady. I don't want you to leave, Bella. No, I don't know what we're going to do, but I would be most honored and very grateful if you would stay.

BELLA. Why, thank you, Dede.

SHIRLEY. Kick them both out. Kick them out!

BELLA. (*Rising.*) Well . . . (*She pulls off her eyelashes, crosses onto the platform, picks up the phone and starts dialing.*) All I can say is, we have certainly had some purifying forces at work here tonight. And it just warms me inside to think that Joanne in a

single evening is going to save us from amateurism and exhibitionism, and to hell with those Rosenschlags. If they don't want to show up, they don't have to.

SUITS. Dede, please tell her to stop . . .

SHIRLEY. (*Crossing to* C. *and indicating Dede.*) This is the son-of-a-bitch we have to stop.

BELLA. (*Into the phone.*) Hello? Is this the Brady residence? Are you Mr. Brady? Oh, are you the father of that wonderful Brady boy, who took classes at the New Alamo Theater?

JOANNE. (*Crossing to Dede.*) Dede, tell her to hang up.

DEDE. (*Crossing* D. *of the desk.*) Bella can use my phone any time she wants.

BELLA. I'm calling as a friend of Miss Joanne Remington.

JOANNE. (*Stepping in.*) Don't you dare use my name, you maniac! Don't you dare!

BELLA. She saw your boy go into the monastery across the street from the Alamo, and there is a man over there who is doing awful things to your boy, Mr. Brady . . . Miss Joanne Remington! Miss Joanne Remington! (*Joanne crosses to Bella and reaches up to take the phone from her. Bella lifts the phone above her head threateningly.*) Don't . . . you ever touch me! (*Bella has moved with such force that Joanne has been knocked off balance and she falls into the chair* D. *of the table. Suits runs* L. *to assist Joanne. She stands just* U. *of the table. Bella continues into the phone as she crosses* R. *off the platform.*) Mr. Brady, he's a darlin' boy . . . (*The phone receiver is pulled off the table and lands on the floor. Bella looks at the fallen receiver for a moment, then ignores it and goes back to her conversation.*) I think he has the most talent of any . . . (*Suits reaches behind the table and with considerable effort pulls the phone junction box from its connection. She holds the broken connection in her hand glares at Bella for a moment, then throws the dead wire at Bella's feet. Bella picks up the receiver from the floor and continues her conversation into the phone.*) . . . as I was saying, Mr. Brady, (*Joanne rises, and they all focus their attention on Bella.*) We think Miss Remington shows a propensity for voyeurism. Yes! We think she gets her kicks by watching. None of us knew about this man across the street until she told us 'cause we don't spend all our time peering out the windows the way she does. Then again, she may have made up the whole thing. And this mean nymphomaniac she brought in from

New York isn't going to change anything because she's a mental case herself. Eight years ago, Mr. Brady, this mean nymphomaniac rented a one-bedroom garden apartment across from an up-and-coming singing star from Louisiana . . . and this up-and-coming singing star used to watch each night as the mean nymphomaniac came home after her performance . . .

SUITS. Don't Bella.

BELLA. Oh, it was very strange in that garden enclosure, with the lights reflecting on the pool and all the doors shut tight. 'Cept suddenly the door of the mean nymphomaniac would open an inch.

SUITS. Please, don't . . .

BELLA. Now that's the kind of thing that really captures your attention if you can't sleep. And God knows I couldn't sleep because I had a son I had to provide for one way or another. And then suddenly along the walkway would come a shadow. A shadow of something that looked like an overweight manatee.

SUITS. Stop it, Bella.

BELLA. An overweight manatee wearing a pantsuit . . .

SHIRLEY. You're not going to have this joke at my expense.

BELLA. And this overweight manatee would tiptoe right for that ajar door, carrying a loaf of freshly baked bread.

SUITS. Stop it!

BELLA. It would creep through the door . . .

SHIRLEY. You must feel very threatened.

BELLA. It would go into the kitchenette and put the bread in the bread box . . .

SUITS. Please, I am begging you Bella, please!

BELLA. . . . so the mean nymphomaniac could have something good to eat for breakfast.

SHIRLEY. It's not me you're hurting, you know.

BELLA. Then the overweight manatee would go into the bedroom where the mean nymphomaniac would pretend to be asleep . . . *(Bella throws the phone to the floor* D. L. *and moves in on Shirley.)*

SHIRLEY. Sexuality is not what we are talking about.

SUITS. Jesus Christ, Dede, stop her.

BELLA. And the manatee would commence an exotic ritual . . . *(Bella pulls Shirley's coat off her shoulders and down to her waist. We see that Shirley is wearing nothing underneath. Suits charges Bella and grabbing her about the neck, pulls her off Shirley and onto the floor.)*

SUITS. I'll kill you, you son-of-a-bitch! I'll kill you! I'll kill you! *(Dede and Joanne rush in and pull Suits off Bella. They pull her* U., *as Bella slowly and painfully crawls* L *to the telephone. She picks it up.)*

BELLA. Good night, Mr. Brady. *(Shirley crosses around the desk and sits. Joanne crosses onto the platform* L., *standing* D. *of the table.)* Jes-us! *(Rising and crossing.* U. C.) We have got dykes to the rear, we got homos out the window. We are sandwiched in by inverts. *(Crossing* D. L.) Come on you Rosenschlags and Bradys, we can't handle this goddamn invasion by ourselves.

SUITS. You can turn it off now, Bella.

BELLA. *(Crossing* U. C.) When I was little, you know what we called you locomotives—we called you, choo-choos. Well you both gave great choo-choo performances. Now out, you diesels, out! *(She moves* D. L. *and starts pumping her arms and legs in rhythm, miming a locomotive.)* Choo-choo, choo-choo, choo-choo . . . *(Suits finally explodes and charges like a wild bull, pulling back her fist ready to sock Bella.)*

SUITS. *(Bellowing, sheer physical strength and power taking control.)* All right, children, playtime is over. Sit down! Sit down!! *(She forces Bella to sit on the edge of the platform.)* If you move, I'll give you an uppercut that will knock your teeth out! You're pathetic! You are all pathetic! *(Moving back* U.) Ever since I came here everybody has been lookin' right through me. Everybody! . . . has always looked right through me. *(Crossing to Dede.)* Well, you are looking at me now. Aren't you, Dede! Aren't you!

DEDE. I never meant you any malice, Suits. I'm sorry. I did not want you hurt.

JOANNE. Suits, will you get out of here.

SUITS. *(Crossing toward Joanne.)* Oh, no! I'm not walking out until I get something straight. When Shirley came down that year that was the biggest thing that ever happened in my whole life. She looked just like every movie star I ever dreamed about. And all I could think about was—Oh my God! How am I ever going to get up enough nerve to be in the same room with her, much less talk to her.

JOANNE. *(Sitting* D. *of the table.)* Suits, I don't want to hear this.

SUITS. Oh, well, you're going to—'cause no one is ever going to leave me feeling ugly and dirty again. *(Moving* D. *toward Bella.)* Now . . . it took me a month just to stop in her dressing room.

And you know what I did? I brought her a sandwich. Stupid me. But all I could think of was the best thing in this town—the sandwiches at Mangliati's. Oh! Fat Beatrice! Always stuffing herself at Mangliati's! Well I brought her a Mangliati Special and I gave it to her and I said, "Here, I think you're going to like this." (*Crossing* C.) And she looked at me. She looked right at me, and I knew she saw me. And I tell you, at that moment I would have done anything for her. I wanted to do everything. I wanted to clean her clothes. I wanted to do her laundry. I wanted to iron her costumes. You're shit! You are all shit! We would sit and we would talk! About stupid things. She would laugh at things I had to say. I was so starved just for a little human companionship. Nobody ever talked to me like that before in my whole life. I just wanted to be with her. I just wanted to bring her gifts. Just wanted to be near somebody who would smile at me.

JOANNE. This is disgusting!

DEDE. Suits, you don't have to tell us any of this.

SUITS. If she asked me for anything, I would have gotten it for her. I was full of love. And she let me touch her. She actually let me hold her. And I didn't think there was anything dirty or perverted about it. You see, I thought she cared. I did! I thought she cared! But it was very funny. 'Cause I remember when she left. She didn't say any of the things I expected. (*Moving closer to Shirley.*) Like "We'll write" or "we'll keep in touch" or "we'll talk" or "why don't you do this?" or "Why don't you do that?" She just said, "Take it easy." Take it easy? Then she looked right through me and it was just like all the rest of you. (*Moving* U.) After she was gone I came back to the theater and I sat in her dressing room for three hours all by myself, and I thought, "Everybody in this theater is a liar. They act." She was a wonderful actress, Dede, you underestimated her. (*Concentrating on Shirley.*) Shirley, you just left. You could move on. I could never have done that to you. You just played your part for the time and for the moment it was so real. (*Back to Dede.*) All you people in the theater do, that's why I hate it. Nobody in this crazy house will ever just put out a hand—make you feel like you're something. (*Crossing* D. *to Bella.*) Nobody here will ever make you feel like you are wanted! Like they want to be with you. That's why I had to leave. I don't like the theater anymore. It makes me so sad. Nothing is very real here for very long.

JOANNE. Suits, I think it would be a good idea if you were to pack your bags and be sure to be out of my house before I get home tonight.

BELLA. And make sure you take only that which belongs to you! *(Bella's words cut through Suits, and she moves slowly until she is standing right over Bella. She leans over and gives Bella a kiss on the mouth. Bella tries to break free, finally succeeds, and moves quickly away, wiping her mouth.)* Jesus Christ! *(Suits straightens herself up, takes one last look at Shirley, then turns and proudly exits* U.*)*

SHIRLEY. *(Crossing to the* U. *arch.)* I feel so sorry for her that she can still be hurt by her sexuality. Somehow we have got to be together and not apart. That's what my plan was. We are all little one woman shows that are very frightening because it's impossible to move. It's too threatening to move. I get threatened myself. So I'm asking you to help me. Just help me. *(One by one she looks at the others who stare back at her stony-eyed and unmoved. Slowly she pulls her coat tightly around her and exits* U. C.*)*

DEDE. *(Crossing to the desk and turning on the intercom.)* Bill? Bill, are you there?

BILL'S VOICE. Yes, Mrs. Cooper.

DEDE. Bill, *the* Miss Shirley Fuller has just left the Remington Room. Would you send a couple of the bartenders up to help escort her out of the building. Watch out for *the* Miss Shirley Fuller though because she's freaked out and might need an ambulance, do you understand me, Bill?

BILL'S VOICE. Got you, Mrs. Cooper.

DEDE. *(Shutting off the intercom and crossing* C.*)* Well, I guess you owe me an apology, Joanne.

JOANNE. *(Crossing to Dede.)* I owe you no such thing. Just because I made a mistake about Shirley Fuller doesn't mean I've made a mistake about you.

DEDE. And what is that supposed to mean?

JOANNE. It means I'm still going to bring someone down here to ride herd on you, that's what it means. *(Crossing to the* D. R. *bar.)* And that much I am still going to tell the Board of Trustees tonight. I don't think we misunderstand each other on that point.

DEDE. *(Crossing to the desk.)* I don't think the problem is in the area of misunderstanding. I think it's more like misestimation.

JOANNE. Ha! You're the last one to correct my English.

DEDE. (*Picking up the goober.*) Yes, but I am the first one to know you don't get very far in Texas by misestimation. Oh, I come from the dirt, all right—I'm just like a Prairie Dog—you know, you can't catch them. I'm here, I'm there—I'm over yonder —you can never tell where I'm going to be next. But I'm always out there somewhere. You know how those Prairie Dogs are. Just when you think you've got them, and you've run them down a hole—they pop up somewhere else. You just can't catch them.

JOANNE. If I were you, I wouldn't misestimate me. If you think that because I was raised with money and properly educated, that I'm weak, you're mistaken. (*Crossing behind the desk.*) I'll take over the Alamo myself tonight if necessary.

DEDE. (*Moving* U., *around the desk and behind Joanne.*) Joanne, you're not a member of the family of clowns—as much as you would like to be. You have to be a poor clown to be in the theater. (*Dede touches Joanne with the goober as she passes behind her, and then continues moving* D. R.)

JOANNE. Get that away from me, or I'll wrap it around your neck!

BELLA. Oh, Dede, did you hear that? She threatened you with physical violence!

DEDE. (*Crossing* L.) Shut up, Bella.

JOANNE. What did you think? Just because you were born a poor hick you cornered the market on grit? You have no idea how strong a gal had to be to survive the onslaught of Biblical passages which defined a woman in my parent's house: "And the head of the woman is man" that's Corinthians; and Timothy, "Every woman should be ashamed of the thought that she is a woman." (*With a yell, Dede holds the goober in front of her like a weapon and charges at Joanne. Joanne merely lifts a hand and stops her with her icy tone.*) Stop that, you animal!

DEDE. That is what you find repulsive about me, isn't it? I bleat like some kind of animal. (*Crossing to* L. C.) Is that why, in all these years, you have never once invited me to your house, you son-of-a-bitch!

JOANNE. (*Crossing to* R. C.) You'd be out of place at any party I gave. You're raised like a mongrel, you can't just put on a lime green dress and expect the mud doesn't show anymore.

DEDE. (*Crossing to* D. R. *of Joanne.*) You belong to some other race, don't you? You and your herd are a genetically pure pack of

cows. All the right brands. (*Dede turns and again smacks Joanne with the goober.*)

JOANNE. I told you to keep that away from me!

DEDE. (*Moving* R.) Well, my mama told me, "You keep a cattle prod around, Dede, sometimes one of them high-bred cows doesn't want to go into the corral. You've got to give her a good whack! (*Dede whirls about in order to hit Joanne again, but Joanne catches it in her hand and pulls it away from Dede.*)

JOANNE. Don't you dare touch me with that filthy thing again, or I'll smack you across the face with it. (*Joanne realizes that she is now holding the goober in her hand and is repulsed by the contact. She throws it away* U.) You disgusting mutt!

DEDE. Joanne, we are ladies here at the Alamo! Ladies!

JOANNE. You are not a lady! You are a rodent—that's what a Prairie Dog is! Something I was taught to despise ever since I was a child. You are a destructive mammal burrowing under the earth, tearing apart and chewing at the roots of anything that's trying to grow! You are devouring this theater with no sense of where you're going or the importance of what it is you're destroying! (*Crossing to the desk to pick up her bag.*) I and the Board of Trustees will begin legal action tomorrow and we'll have you out of here in a week. (*Dede grabs the hammer from the desk, and crashes it down on the desk. She then holds it above her head and crosses to block Joanne's exit.*)

DEDE. (*Screaming.*) Is that what you goddam think! Huh?

JOANNE. You're as sick as the others.

DEDE. (*Exploding, wielding the hammer high over Joanne's head, and forcing Joanne back* D. L. *till she ends up sitting on the edge of the platform.*) BULLSHIT! If I was a man you'd just say I'm belligerent. But just because I'm a lady, I'm sick, huh? Now, I want you to stay here, and you're going to stay a while or this hammer is going to come right down and crack open your skull. You just don't blink an eye, or I will tear off your scalp with the hook on this thing, you understand me? You will at best go running down the hall with this protruding right out of your temple! I am not devouring this theater, lady! Everything this theater has, I gave it! And I have given it as an amateur. Yes! Out of love. And I am proud to be an amateur, and I am ashamed that I had tried to forget it for so long. You know, you made the mistake of reminding me how immune I am to your kind of bigoted aristocracy. And

if I want to I can invent a story about you being a dyke. I'll make up that you are a dyke, you've been living with a dyke and Bella and I say we have seen you be a dyke—and if that don't work, we can make you black! And I point out to you that the members of the Board that I have not charmed, Bella has amused. Now I'm telling you what you're going to do. You came in here tonight and you made a fuss. And the kind of fuss you made in here tonight is the kind of thing that I can kill you for. You are not in this room with the Persian Lamb Set, honey. You are in here with the Monkey Fur Set. I did not drip my blood around this town for almost twenty years to have you fussing me out. Now the only thing I want to know is am I going to have to kill you? (*Lifting the hammer again and moving in on Joanne.*) Did you hear me, you female son-of-a-bitch? Do I have to kill you?

JOANNE. (*Screaming and covering her head.*) No!

DEDE. No? (*Crossing to the desk.*) Well, I didn't think I'd have to. (*Crossing to* C.) Tonight you will resign as President of the Board. In fact, you *have* resigned and your resignation is accepted! Tomorrow I will appoint another Miss Moneybags and if she does not have a foundation I'll help her invent one. There are fifty people in this town just dying to be what you are—a parasite! A leech that sucks on the backs of talented people. And there's twenty different kinds of talent—and one of them is the talent to survive! Now you just go on sitting around in your basic black and your goddamn pearls! You never did an honest day's work in your life. All you ever did was ring your bell and some servant came running to wipe your ass. Well, honey, I don't come running when you ring your bell. I may be a national joke, you son-of-a-bitch, but I am a local success! And I don't care where you see me, if it's in a theater lobby or a restaurant or in the street, you get up and get out of my way. Now go on, get! Get! Get! (*She chases Joanne out the door with the hammer. Dede stops at the door. She is exhausted. She turns and throws the hammer across the floor, then crosses* D. R. *to the bar.*)

BELLA. (*Rising.*) Oh, My God, that was fun. (*Crossing to the window.*) Well, I don't think anybody else is going to show up across the street tonight. Maybe they had trouble loading their shotguns. I mean, the men in the family. Do you think they had a temporary loading problem?

DEDE. Yeah, maybe that was it.

BELLA. All the lights are out now.

DEDE. (*Crossing to* C.) Well, they probably thought you were loco anyway. You always sound loco when you're drunk. You probably never had anyone on the phone—but that sure was a good performance!

BELLA. So was yours. (*A boat.*) Dede, are you still angry at me? About me and Howie?

DEDE. No, I'm frightened. I'm frightened because I have the feeling that if you had simply told me you and Howie had gotten drunk together and ended up in bed—I think I would have had a little laugh and just forgotten about it. That kind of thing doesn't seem very important anymore. Maybe we're the reason the cavalry doesn't charge anymore. Maybe we've *become* the cavalry.

BELLA. (*Crossing off the platform, and sitting on the edge.*) Listen, I was down to Neiman-Marcus yesterday. I ran into Laura Riche over at the gun counter. She just bought eight city blocks in Dallas. I think she'd be real fine as the new President of the Board.

DEDE. (*Crossing to Bella.*) She sill stout?

BELLA. Oh, yep. She weighs two hundred fifty pounds now and she was wearing hot pants, and she bought an elephant safari gun. Two hundred fifty pounds, hot pants, with a steel button fly. (*She laughs infectiously, Dede joins in.*)

DEDE. But would she wear them to Board meetings? (*They both start to laugh loudly.*) Now you stop it, Bella, you're trying to get us into one of your laughing jags, and I don't want to do that. I think we need Helen Fitzgibbons. She's got more of the important qualifications to be President of the Board. Just put her husband in the grave. She told me he left her forty-seven million. She said she just got back from Houston where she bought a swinging singles' condominium. She said she saw cunnilingus in the pool. I thought she was talking about a fungus. (*Bella and Dede really begin to howl. Dede is the first one to sober, after checking her watch, she goes to the intercom and turns it on. The final moments of* The Seagull *are heard on the speakers. Realizing that the Board of Trustees will soon be coming into the room, both women start tidying up and preparing the room for the reception.*)

TRIGORIN'S VOICE. I don't remember it. I don't remember. (*There is the sound of a gun shot on the speakers.*)

MADAME ARKADINA'S VOICE. What's that?

BELLA. All the lights are out now.

DEDE. (*Crossing to* C.) Well, they probably thought you were loco anyway. You always sound loco when you're drunk. You probably never had anyone on the phone—but that sure was a good performance!

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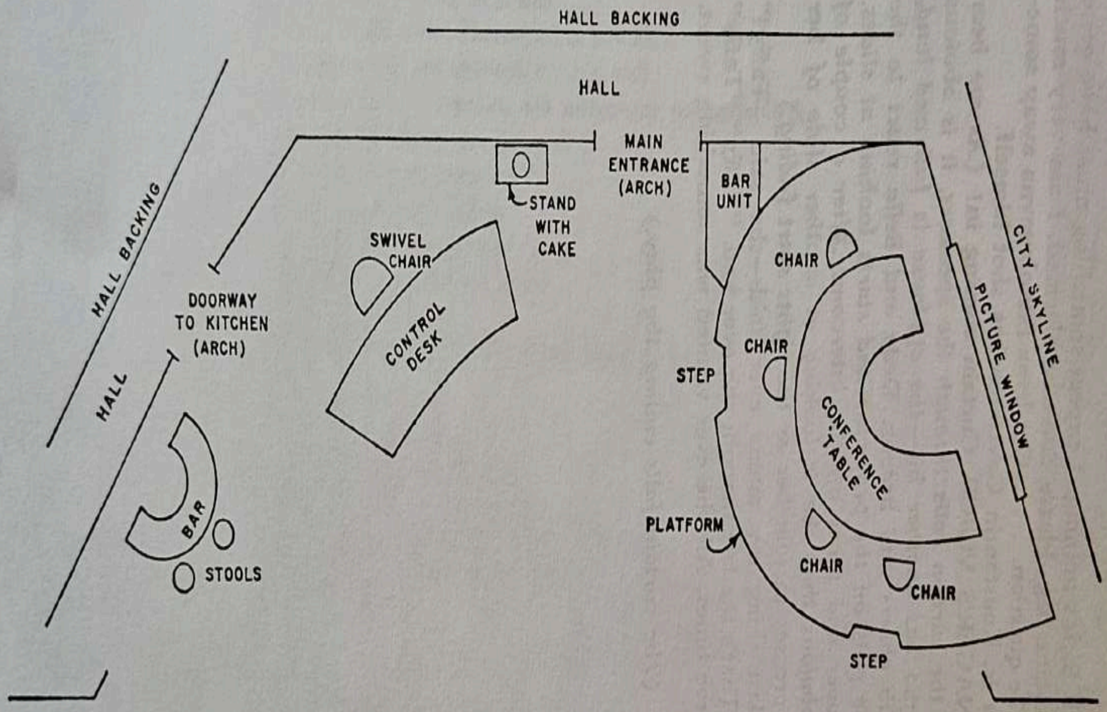
MADAME ARKADINA'S VOICE. What's that?

DORN'S VOICE. It's nothing. I expect something must have gone off in my medicine bag. Please don't be alarmed. I am very much interested in the question. . . . Get Irina Nikolayevna away somehow. The fact is, Konstantin Gavrilitch has shot himself.

STAGE MANAGER'S VOICE. Curtain coming in! (*As we hear the sound of the curtain calls through the speakers, it is obvious that The Alamo has another hit—the applause is full and loud, and laced with cheers and bravos. Dede and Bella react to the triumph. Dede puts on the projector and starts looking at slides. She reaches over and turns off the intercom. After a couple of slides, it is obvious that she is looking at another slide of her mother. Bella crosses to join her as the lights start fading.*)

DEDE. The last thing my mama ever said—she said "Taffy!" Taffy candy! That's the last thought she ever had. "Taffy" "Taffy" She said it three times. All she ever wanted was something sweet.

(*The curtain falls ending the play.*)


HALL BACKING
HALL
MAIN ENTRANCE (ARCH)
BAR UNIT
CITY SKYLINE
PICTURE WINDOW
STAND WITH CAKE
SWIVEL CHAIR
CONTROL DESK
HALL BACKING
DOORWAY TO KITCHEN (ARCH)
HALL
CHAIR
CHAIR
STEP
CONFERENCE TABLE
PLATFORM
CHAIR
CHAIR
STEP
BAR
STOOLS

SCENE DESIGN

"LADIES AT THE ALAMO"

PROPERTY PLOT

ACT ONE

On Stage:
Platters of food, including barbecued ribs, on bars and conference table
Bottles of liquor, buckets of champagne, ice buckets, glasses, on bars
Large cake in shape of new Alamo Theater, on skirted stand, at U. R. C.
Assorted play posters, on R. wall
Picture of old Alamo Theater, on U. L. wall
Theater awards and citations, on U. L. wall
Console panel for intercom, and microphone, on control desk
Nail, for bull's head, on U. L. wall
Slide projector, on control desk
Telephone, on control desk
Press clippings, on control desk
Telephone, on conference table
Napkins, on bars
Dried bull's "goober" in drawer of control desk

Off Stage:
2 slide carousels (Dede)
Folders, with papers (Suits)
Cigarettes and matches (Shirley)
Prop rifle, with noisemaker attached (Bella)
Attache case, with papers (Shirley)

ACT TWO

On Stage:
Papers, on conference table (Suits)
Cigarettes and matches (Suits)
Attache case, on control desk (Shirley)
Purse, with checkbook and pen (Bella)
Phone book, on conference table

Off Stage:
Glass of whiskey (Bella)
Cigarettes and matches (Shirley)
Folder, with papers (Dede)
Hammer and nails (Dede)
Shoulder bag, with pill bottle (Shirley)
Mounted bull's head (Bella)
Purse, with sealed envelope (Joanne)
Watch (Dede)